NATION

Stem cell therapy for autism is malpractice: SC

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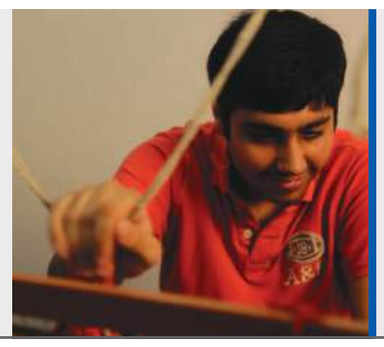

BUSINESS

Silver falls 17% in worst crash in 15 years

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SPORTS

Djokovic reaches 38th Grand Slam final

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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K'taka mulls social media curbs for kids

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

Karnataka's Minister for Electronics and IT/BT, Priyank Kharge, on Friday said the government is consulting on measures to ensure responsible use of AI and social media, particularly among children.

His remarks came in response to senior BJP MLA and former minister Suresh Kumar, who raised concerns about children's exposure to social media, including pornographic content, during the discussion on the motion of thanks to the Governor's address.

The move follows similar plans considered by Andhra Pradesh, while Australia banned all social media accounts for minors under 16 in December 2025. The Economic Survey 2026, tabled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, also recommended age-based online access and reducing online teaching to curb digital addiction among children. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Sunetra Pawar likely to be sworn in as M'rashtra DyCM

Swearing in today after NCP legislature party meeting

MUMBAI, 30 JAN

Sunetra Pawar, Rajya Sabha MP and the wife of deceased NCP chief Ajit Pawar, is likely to be sworn in as Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister on Saturday, party sources said.

She would be the first woman to hold the post in the state.

Following the death of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar in an air crash in Baramati on Wednesday, a section of Nationalist Congress Party leaders had demanded that she should get the post.

"Tomorrow, a parliamentary board meeting of the party will take place in Mumbai, where Sunetra Pawar will be elected as the leader of the legislature party," said a source.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Friday said the BJP would support any decision taken by the family and party of late Ajit Pawar.

NCP(SP) leader Supriya Sule with RS MP Sunetra Pawar at Ajit Pawar's funeral in Baramati *—PTI*

"I can only tell you that we are standing behind the family of Ajit Dada and NCP," he added.

Until the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Sunetra Pawar had kept a low profile. In the general elections that year, she stood from Baramati as the candidate of her husband's party, but was defeated by her sister-in-law and incumbent NCP (SP) MP Supriya Sule in the prestige battle.

Sunetra was subsequently elected to the Rajya Sabha.

Fadnavis had conveyed that he had no issue if her swearing-in ceremony as Deputy CM took place on Saturday itself, provided a decision to that effect was taken by the party, said NCP Chhagan Bhujbal.

Sunetra Pawar is currently not a member of either House of the Maharashtra legislature. However, the Baramati assembly seat in Pune district has fallen vacant after Ajit Pawar's death. NCP's tally in the 288-member state assembly came down to 40 with Ajit Pawar's death. *—PTI*

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—PTI

SC mandates free sanitary pads for girls in all schools

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

In a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court on Friday declared the right to menstrual health as an integral part of the right to life under Article 21. It directed all states and Union Territories to provide free oxo-biodegradable sanitary napkins and functional, gender-segregated toilets in all schools.

A Bench comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan issued a series of mandatory directions applicable to government, aided and private schools alike, warning of stringent consequences for non-compliance. These include de-recognition of private schools and holding state governments directly accountable for failures in public institutions.

Authoring the verdict, Justice Pardiwala held that access to safe, effective and affordable menstrual hygiene measures is essential for enabling a girl child to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. The Bench ruled that the right to a healthy reproductive life encompasses access to education and information about sexual health.

The court directed that sanitary napkins be made easily accessible to girl students, preferably within toilet premises through vending machines, or alternatively at designated points or with designated authorities within schools.

On sanitation infrastructure, the Bench ordered all states and UTs to ensure that every school has functional, gender-segregated toilets with usable water connectivity. All existing and newly constructed toilets must ensure privacy and accessibility, including for children with disabilities, and be equipped with hand-washing facilities with soap and water.

The judgment underscored that education is a "multiplier right" enabling the exercise of other fundamental rights, and that substantive equality under Article 14 requires addressing structural and systemic barriers. Inaccessibility of menstrual hygiene facilities, it said, undermines dignity, privacy and equal participation in education, leading to long-term exclusion. *—PTI*

Rs 95L spent on K'taka Assembly meals: RTI

BELAGAVI, 30 JAN

More than Rs 95 lakh was spent on providing free meals and refreshments to ministers and legislators during four Karnataka Assembly sessions held in Bengaluru in 2024 and 2025, an RTI activist has alleged.

Addressing a press conference on Friday, RTI activist Bhimappa Gadad said the expenditure is violation as there is no provision for such facilities under Assembly rules.

Citing information obtained under the Right to Information Act from the Legislative Assembly Secretariat, he stated that payments were made to hotels at fixed rates: Rs 325 per breakfast, Rs 650 per lunch or dinner, Rs 200 for light refreshments, and Rs 50 per cup of tea or coffee per person.

This costed the State exchequer Rs 95,83,395 for sessions held in February and July 2024, and March and August 2025. The Karnataka Assembly has 224 MLAs.

- Addressing a press conference on Friday, RTI activist Bhimappa Gadad said the expenditure is violation as there is no provision for such facilities under Assembly rules.

Gadad said the Secretariat had confirmed that there was no rule permitting free meals during Assembly sessions held in Bengaluru. He demanded that the entire amount be recovered from the Speaker.

He said he had written to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his Deputy DK Shivakumar, seeking immediate action, and warned that he will approach the court over the issue.

Gadad also pointed out that a petition is already pending before the Dharwad Bench of the High Court challenging the practice of providing free meals during the winter session in Belagavi, where legislators already receive daily allowances. *—Salar News*

ED arrests ex-RCOM prez in Rs 40K cr 'fraud' case

WASHINGTON, 30 JAN

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) said it has arrested former Reliance Communications (RCOM) president Punit Garg, 61, for money laundering in an alleged Rs 40,000 crore bank loan fraud case against the companies of Anil Ambani. Garg was arrested on Thursday.

A Delhi PMLA court sent him to nine days custody on Friday. Garg was arrested in connection with an alleged Rs 40,000 crore bank fraud case and money laundering by RCOM and its group entities, the ED said. *—PTI*

Centre's fiscal deficit reaches 54.5% of yearly target

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The Centre's fiscal deficit at end-December stood at Rs 8.55 lakh crore, 54.5 per cent of the 2025-26 target, versus 56.7 per cent a year ago. Estimated deficit for 2025-26 is 4.4 per cent of GDP, or Rs 15.69 lakh crore. CGA data showed receipts of Rs 25.25 lakh crore, 72.2 per cent of estimates, Rs 19.39 lakh crore tax, Rs 5.39 lakh crore non-tax and Rs 46,047 crore non-debt capital receipts. Tax devolution to states was Rs 10.38 lakh crore, Rs 1.37 lakh crore higher. Expenditure totalled Rs 33.8 lakh crore. *—PTI*

Low risk of Nipah virus spreading beyond India: WHO

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

World Health Organisation on Friday said the risk of the Nipah virus spreading beyond India remains low and it does not recommend any travel or trade restrictions following two reported infections. The two infected health workers in West Bengal are hospitalised. The virus, carried by fruit bats and animals such as pigs, causes fever and brain inflammation and has a fatality rate of 40–75 per cent. While further exposure cannot be ruled out, person-to-person transmission typically requires prolonged contact. The source of infection remains unclear. *—PTI*

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A police official and others exit Confident Group's office building in Bengaluru on Friday; Inset" CJ Roy *—MOHAMMED ASAD*

Amid IT raids, Confident Group chairman kills himself

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

CJ Roy, 57, Chairman of the Confident Group, died by suicide on Friday at his office in Bengaluru while Income Tax raids were under way, police said.

According to sources, Income Tax officials were at his office when the incident took place.

During the raids, officials allegedly found assets disproportionate to his known sources of income, sources said.

Police said they suspect it to be a case of suicide, though the final conclusion will be drawn after the post-mortem examination.

A prominent real estate developer, Roy headed the Confident Group, which has a strong presence across several southern states, particularly Kerala and Karnataka. Founded in 2005, the group is a major player in real estate and infrastructure, with projects spanning residential apartments, villas, commercial complexes and mixed-use developments.

A native of Kochi, Roy was also active in the Malayalam film industry and had produced films, including Mohanlal's big-budget 'Casanova'. The Confident Group was also the title sponsor for several seasons of Bigg Boss Malayalam, hosted by Mohanlal. *—Agencies*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416 or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

RAJIV GOWDA GRANTED CONDITIONAL BAIL IN ASSAULT CASE

SIDLAGATTA, 30 JAN

Suspended Congress leader Rajiv Gowda was granted conditional bail on Friday by the Judicial Magistrate of First Class (JMFC) in Sidlagatta, Chikkaballapur district, following allegations of improper behaviour with a woman officer.

The court granted him conditional bail with instructions not to indulge in misconduct or tampering with evidence and directed him to cooperate with investigators.

Gowda was accused of speaking abusively to Amrutha Gowda, the Commissioner of the City Municipal Corporation (CMC) in Sidlagatta, during a conversation on the 12th of this month. The viral audio clip focused on the removal of a banner supporting the film "Cult" in Sidlagatta, with Gowda questioning the Commissioner about the civic authorities' actions. When she attempted to reason with him, Gowda yelled, used abusive language, and threatened her.

Police registered two FIRs following complaints. *—Salar News*

GETS 50 STITCHES

B'luru woman gets mauled by pet dog

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

A Bengaluru woman sustained serious injuries and had to get 50 stitches after being mauled by a pet dog while out on her morning walk on 26 January. The shocking incident has raised fresh concerns over pet safety in residential neighbourhoods.

The attack occurred around 6.54am in HSR Layout, reportedly outside the victim's house. Police said the dog, owned by Amaresh Reddy, suddenly attacked the woman, biting her on the face, neck, hands and legs. She was rushed to hospital with severe injuries.

Doctors said the woman got more than 50 stitches administered to her face and neck. She remains hospitalised and under observation.

A passer-by who attempted to rescue the woman was also bitten during the incident. While the extent of the bystander's injuries has not been disclosed, police said the person was treated at a hospital.

Following the attack, the woman's husband lodged a complaint alleging negligence by the dog owner. *—Agencies*

Video captures cop resisting arrest in bribery case

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

A video showing police inspector Govindaraju in distress after being caught accepting a Rs 4 lakh bribe has surfaced on social media, a day after his arrest. The footage depicts Govindaraju, in uniform, being held by Lokayukta officials while shouting and resisting arrest. Govindaraju, attached to KP Agrahara police station, was caught on 29 January following a complaint from Md Akbar, 42. Akbar alleged that Govindaraju demanded Rs 5 lakh to assist with a case at the station. The Lokayukta police registered a case under the Prevention of Corruption Act, revealing Rs 1 lakh had been collected earlier, with the remaining Rs 4 lakh received during the arrest. *—PTI*

- PTI

Lokayukta raids premises of Koppal IMS CAO Kallesh

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

The Lokayukta sleuths on Friday carried out raids at the house and premises linked to Koppal Institute of Medical Sciences Chief Administrative Officer B Kallesh. According to the Lokayukta officials, the raids were carried out from the morning at five places linked to the officer. *—PTI*

Cong files plaint over BJP's 'scam lord' post

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

The Congress on Thursday filed a complaint against the BJP IT Cell for allegedly posting defamatory content targeting CM Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM DK Shivakumar. Advocate N Narendra of the Congress legal cell said a morphed image was shared on social media platform X from the BJP's official handle (@BJP4Karnataka) on 29 January. The edited image portrayed CM, DyCM and other ministers in a distorted manner under the caption "Scam Lord", alleging the Congress government was "looting Karnataka day and night". Narendra said the images of constitutional office-holders were deliberately altered, misleading and vulgar, amounting to character assassination without evidence. *—PTI*

NCB uncovers Rs 10 cr drug lab in Mysuru, 4 arrested

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) uncovered a clandestine drug manufacturing laboratory in Mysuru and arrested four individuals from Rajasthan, seizing narcotics worth Rs 10 crore. The arrested include mastermind Mahindra Kumar Vishnoi and three others, all residents of Jalore district in Rajasthan. The operation began on 28 January in Surat, Gujarat, where officials intercepted an SUV carrying approximately 35kg of Mephedrone. The investigation led authorities to the laboratory operating under the guise of a chemical cleaning products unit in Hebbal Industrial Area, Mysuru. The facility was rented by a co-accused and a relative of Vishnoi. *—PTI*

Govt mulls social media curbs for kids

Govt holding talks to take adequate measures

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

Senior BJP MLA Suresh Kumar raised concerns over exposure of children to social media, during a discussion *-FREEPIK*

Karnataka Minister for Electronics, IT/BT Priyank Kharge on Friday told the Legislative Assembly that the government was holding consultations to put in place measures for responsible use of AI (Artificial Intelligence) and social media, especially among children.

The minister's comments came in response to senior BJP MLA and former Minister Suresh Kumar's point raising concerns over exposure of children to social media, including pornographic content, during the discussion on motion of thanks to Governor's address.

The BJP MLA cited Australia which recently banned the use of the social media platforms by those under 16 years of age, and the central government's Economic Survey pitching for an age bar for social media access.

Referring to social media ban for children, the central government's Economic Survey tabled in Parliament on Thursday, Suresh Kumar said age-based access to online platforms should be considered while also cutting down on the online teaching to avoid digital addiction.

Kumar said, "Australia has taken a very serious decision that children under the age of 16 should not be exposed to social media. The report (Economic Survey) submitted in the Lok Sabha yesterday has also expressed concerns over premature exposure of children to social media."

He also expressed concerns over exposure of children to porn online.

"This is a very serious matter. The State government should also take a decision regarding social media. Neighbouring Goa has taken a decision. There should be some kind of age limit. Control may not be possible, but we should take some measures. If not done, I don't know what will be the situation of our schools and families," he added.

Minister Kharge admitted that the issue raised by the senior legislator related to a "serious matter".

"Finland also has taken action, the UK is mulling over it, it has been a couple of months since Australia imposed a ban. We, too, in the State are holding consultations regarding what has to be done for responsible use of Artificial Intelligence and social media," he said. *—PTI*

Guv's address practice needs review: BJP leader

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

Senior BJP MLA Suresh Kumar on Friday said that there is a need to revisit the practice of Governor's annual address to the State legislature, and assess its relevance today.

Terming the practice as "colonial hangover", he said, Karnataka should take a lead and ensure a national debate on the practice. He made the remarks while participating in debate on the motion of thanks to the Governor's address in the Legislative Assembly.

His comments appear to go against the party stance. The BJP had rallied behind Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot after read only three lines of the customary Cabinet-approved address and walked out of the joint session of the State legislature on 22 January.

He took exception to critical references to the Centre and its decision to "repeal" MGNREGA.

"The importance, purpose and sanctity of the Governor's address has vanished today. There have been 18 Governors in Karnataka so far since Jayachamarajendra Wodiyar, among them some people like Dharam Vira are still remembered, while few others are remembered for unwanted reasons," Kumar said. *—PTI*

STATE GOVT ORDER

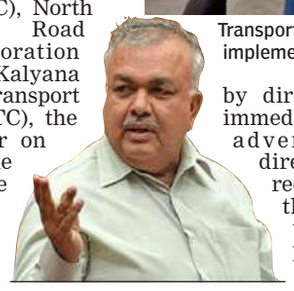
Now, no tobacco ads on buses

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy ordered the directive to be implemented with immediate effect *-SCREENGRAB*

Minister Ramalinga Reddy directed officials to prohibit all direct and indirect advertisements promoting the consumption of tobacco products on buses and at bus stands of the state's four transport corporations.

In a note issued to the managing directors of the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC), North West Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NWKRTC) and Kalyana Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (KKRTC), the Transport Minister on Friday ordered the directive to be implemented with immediate effect.



"In the interest of the public, I hereby direct that, with immediate effect, no advertisements—directly or indirectly promoting the consumption of tobacco products—shall be displayed on buses or at bus stands of the transport corporations," Reddy said.

If such ads are already displayed on buses or at bus stops, a specific timeline should be fixed for their removal, he said. Strict directions should be issued. *—PTI*

FARMERS UNDER SPOTLIGHT

Karnataka State Farmers' Association leaders wear vegetable garlands in protest against the land acquisition for a new railway bypass connecting Rajanukunte to Bettahalasur, at the Press Club on Friday *-MOHAMMED ASAD*

Pay workers decent wages: Patil to MSMEs

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

Minister for Medical Education and Skill Development Sharan Prakash Patil on Friday urged industries, especially MSMEs, to pay wages that allow workers a dignified life in Bengaluru.

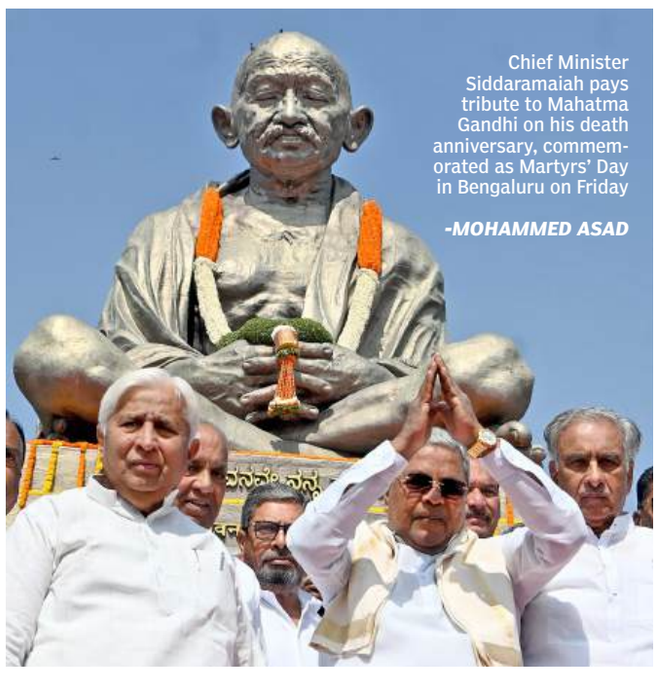
Inaugurating the MSME and Employment Opportunities Conclave organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry, he warned that low pay was driving high attrition despite the availability of skilled manpower.

"I have come across several cases where skilled and qualified employees from tier-two and tier-three regions of Karnataka quit jobs here and return home due to meagre salaries. How can a person from Kalaburagi survive here on just Rs 20,000 a month?" he said.

The remarks came during an interaction in which MSME industrialists flagged a shortage of skilled workers and complained that staff were leaving for larger firms..

—Salar News with Agencies

BJP left behind contractors' dues: CM



Chief Minister Siddaramaiah pays tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary, commemorated as Martyrs' Day in Bengaluru on Friday

-MOHAMMED ASAD

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

A day after the Karnataka State Contractors Association threatened a Statewide protests if the pending dues of Rs 38,000 crore were not cleared by the State Government, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said the BJP left the unpaid debts.

"The pending bills were left behind by the BJP. It is true that there are pending bills, but it was the BJP that left them," Siddaramiah said.

"Of Rs 38,000 crore, Rs 20,000 crore comes from the BJP government, while the rest comes from our government... A crore of bills in their reign itself. Now it has accumulated too much... We have to look after all those things," echoed Minister Ramalinga Reddy.

However, the BJP did not let the ruling party off the hook.

BJP leader CN Ashwath Narayan said noted that the "40 per cent corruption" charge by the Congress during the saffron party's tenure had become a major election campaign, but it was silent now. The Congress raised the slogan based on allegation made by the Contractors Association.

- "Of Rs 38,000 crore, Rs 20,000 crore comes from the BJP government, while the rest comes from our government... A crore of bills in their reign itself. Now it has accumulated too much... We have to look after all those things," said Ramalinga Reddy

On Thursday, the Association's president Manjunath said that they would stop work in February and launch Statewide protests on 5 March if the dues were not cleared. *—ANI*

Girl dies of electrocution at Raichur govt school

RAICHUR, 30 JAN

A class 5 student died from being electrocuted while getting drinking water at her school in Kurukunda village in Sindhanur taluk of Raichur district on Friday. She is suspected to have come into contact with a live wire linked to a water purification unit at the school.

Tanushree Shyamanna Bhajantri, an 11-year-old student at Government Lower Primary School, was electrocuted at school during a midday break around 11.30am, police said.

She sustained serious injuries and collapsed from the electric shock. Although she was immediately taken to a private hospital in the city, she died due to a lack of treatment.

A case has been filed with the Sindhanur rural police, and a probe is underway to ascertain the circumstances leading to the incident.

The incident triggered protests by residents, who alleged negligence on the part of the school authorities, including the headmaster and the School Development and Monitoring Committee. Congress leader R Siddana Gowda expressed condolences for the deceased student. *—Salar News*

Living man issued death certificate in Haveri

HAVERI, 30 JAN

A man in Shiragambi village in Haveri district was issued a death certificate declaring him dead while being still alive.

The man, Topanagouda Gubbi's wife had passed away in August, 2021. He had submitted an application to the village accountant and the Rattihalli tahsildar's office seeking the death certificate of his wife, Mallamma.

However, the accountant mistakenly approved the application by stating that Gubbi had died and issued a death certificate in his name.

- The accountant mistakenly approved the application by stating that Gubbi had died and issued a death certificate in his name

Based on this death certificate, Gubbi's farmer's ID was cancelled and his name removed from the ration card.

Distressed, he has been repeatedly visiting the Tahsildar's office for withdrawal the incorrect document. However, the officials concerned have not initiated any action in this regard so far.

Former BJP MLA BC Basavanagowda Channaba savanagowda Patil also uploaded a video on social media and demanded immediate strict action against the officials who issued the document.

Rattihalli tahsildar Shweta Amaravati told Salar News, "Officials are working to resolve the issue concerning Gubbi's death certificate within three days. A former tahsildar had corrected the error, but the name wasn't deleted from the ejanMa website." *—Salar News*

Prakash Raj should be booked: Narayan on Palestinian film row

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

Former deputy chief minister CN Ashwath Narayan lashed out at Prakash Raj after the actor alleged that the Centre had stalled the screening of Palestinian films at the 17th Bengaluru International Film Festival (BIFFES).

Narayan accused him of being part of the "Tukde gang" and such people shouch face legal action. Raj, the brand ambassador for this year's festival, said that cinema and literature should focus on human stories and not be obstructed by political agendas. He also appealed to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and the state government to allow the screening of Palestinian films at the festival.

Raj said, "The purpose of international film festivals or literary festivals is to share different ideas and provide opportunities for human connection." "Not allowing the screening of Palestinian films at the film festival is unacceptable. I request, and also demand that the state government protest against such bans and take a firm stand in support of screening these films. Like Kerala it should oppose the central government's decision," he said. *—ANI*

DRAFT LABOUR RULES

CITU

Harsh and regressive: Trade Unions slams Congress

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Karnataka government's draft rules under the recently-enacted labour codes are harsh and regressive the CPI(M)-affiliated Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) said at a press conference in New Delhi on Friday.

CITU General Secretary E Kareem noted that many BJP-ruled states are yet to formulate regulations and questioned the Congress-led government's "hurry".

"Congress and its trade union Indian National Trade Union Congress have opposed the labour codes," he noted.

In a statement, the CITU said the rules framed by the State government impose harsher conditions, and grant blanket powers that the central codes never authorised.

"The Karnataka draft rules (January 2026) do not merely implement the central acts. They systematically introduce provisions that are more regressive, arbitrary, and unconstitutional than the central codes themselves, creating a legal framework significantly more dangerous for workers' rights," the statement said.

The trade union also expressed deep concern over the statement made by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant during the hearing on a PIL seeking welfare measures for domestic workers on Thursday. The CJI remarked that trade unions were "largely responsible for stopping industrial growth in the country" and expressed concern that extending legal protections such as minimum wages to domestic workers could result in trade unions dragging households into prolonged litigations.

The new labour codes are designed to weaken the inspection mechanism, and curb workers' right to unionise -- leaving them defenceless -- to promote 'ease of doing business', the CITU alleged, saying the CJI's statement resembled the "political-economic illogic of the Modi government". The press conference comes as the unions prepare for a strike on 12 February. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Modi speaks to Venezuela's acting Prez Rodriguez

New Delhi, 30 Jan

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodriguez on Friday. This was the first time the two leaders spoke since the arrest of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro by the US. "We agreed to further deepen and expand our bilateral partnership in all areas, with a shared vision of taking India-Venezuela relations to new heights in the years ahead," Modi said on X. Rodriguez took over as the interim president of Venezuela on 5 January, two days after US forces seized her predecessor, Maduro, to face trial in New York. —*PTI*

BJP slams Ansari for calling Ghazni 'Indian lootera'

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The BJP criticised ex-vice president M Hamid Ansari for calling Mahmud of Ghazni an "Indian lootera", accusing him of romanticising foreign invaders and anti-Hindu tyrants. BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi dismissed Ansari's remarks as reflecting a "sick mindset". Ansari had said that those portrayed as foreign invaders, including Ghazni, were actually "Indian looteras", claiming they did not come from outside but were Indians. Sharing the video of his comments on X, BJP's Shehzad Poonawalla criticised Ansari for "eulogising" Ghazni, who destroyed the Somnath temple, and accused the Congress of whitewashing crimes of Aurangzeb and others.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

No conspiracy in SP leader's gangrape acquittal: Akhilesh

LUCKNOW, 30 JAN

Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav criticised the BJP after an Ayodhya court acquitted Moeed Khan of gangrape charges, emphasising that "truth is bigger than conspiracy". The special POCSO court acquitted Khan, involved in a 2024 case concerning a 12-year-old girl, while his domestic help Raju was sentenced to 20 years. DNA tests showed the foetal DNA matched Raju's sample, with Khan's test returning negative. Yadav questioned whether the "divisive BJP" had "any bulldozer" capable of rebuilding demolished houses and restoring dignity, and accused the government bias. Following the allegations, Khan's bakery and shopping complex were demolished by the Ayodhya administration. —*PTI*

BJP President Nitin Nabin visits Goa, meets leaders

PANAJI, 30 JAN

BJP president Nitin Nabin held a meeting with senior leaders in Goa on his first visit since becoming party chief. Arriving at Mopa airport, he was welcomed by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, BJP Goa president Damodar Naik, and other officials. Nabin then attended a core committee meeting at the BJP headquarters in Panaji, addressing party leaders for over 30 minutes. Speaking to reporters, Sawant said Nabin will also meet party members in South Goa ahead of upcoming assembly elections early next year. Later, Nabin is scheduled to meet NDA allies including the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party and independent MLAs supporting the government. His visit aims to strengthen BJP's organisation in Goa amid the electoral preparations. —*PTI*

NCP MERGER TALKS NOW ON BACKBURNER

Earlier, sources said Sharad would take a more central role

MUMBAI, 30 JAN

With fast-paced political developments in Maharashtra, the possible merger of the NCP and the Opposition NCP (SP) is likely to be put on the backburner.

NCP leaders insisted on Friday that the priority now was to fill the vacant posts of legislature party leader and Deputy Chief Minister, both held by late Ajit Pawar, who died on Wednesday with four others in a plane crash on Wednesday in Baramati. Ajit's wife Sunetra Pawar may become the next DyCM.

The NCP, which was headed by Ajit, split from the NCP (SP), headed by his uncle Sharad Pawar, in 2023. Ajit joined the Eknath Shinde-led Mahayuti government in July 2023. He was appointed the Deputy CM at that time. Pawar's stint in the same post continued after Devendra Fadnavis came to the helm as CM following the November 2024 assembly polls.

The claim over the (NCP's) party name and poll symbol had seen a bitter contest between the two factions with Ajit's camp getting the original 'NCP' name and analogue alarm clock poll symbol.

NCP(SP) chief Sharad Pawar; tributes to late Maharashtra DyCM Ajit Pawar; Ajit's wife Sunetra Pawar —*PTI*

At present, NCP is part of the Mahayuti government, while NCP (SP) is a constituent of the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA).

"A merger is the need of the hour to build a strong NCP and provide an effective political alternative. Talks had reached an advanced stage, but in Ajit's absence, the question now is who will take the final decision," a senior NCP (SP) leader said.

The talks about the reunification had already started when Ajit was alive. The two parties even contested the civic polls in Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad together.

Earlier, Sources said that the merge is "very much on course", with talks reaching an "advanced stage".

Kiran Gujar, who had been associated with Ajit since before his entry into politics, said on Thursday that Ajit "was one hundred per cent keen on merging both the factions. He had told me five days ago that the entire process was complete and the merger was imminent in the next few days".

"If the merger happens, NCP (SP) leaders would play pivotal roles in the state's governance and party organisation," a source added. Sharad would likely assume a more "central role" a source said.

Analysts say a united NCP would have a formidable combination of nine Lok Sabha MPs and a significant chunk of 51 MLAs, potentially shifting the balance within the ruling Mahayuti alliance or the MVA.

For now, NCP (SP) leaders maintain that their priority is the upcoming local polls on 7 February, which they are contesting in coordination with the Ajit -led faction as a tribute to the late leader's final political efforts. —*PTI*

AHEAD OF POLLS

In Assam, Shah says Rahul disrespected NE

DIBRUGARH, 30 JAN

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of disrespecting the North East by refusing to wear a 'gamosa', presented by President Droupadi Murmu at the 'At Home' reception hosted by her on Republic Day.

All dignitaries, including those from abroad, had worn the scarf as a mark of respect, but Gandhi was the "only person to refuse" to do so, Shah claimed, while addressing a public rally at the Khanikar Parade Ground in Assam.

He asked Gandhi "what enmity does he have towards the people of NE....why such injustice against the people of the region".

"Rahul Gandhi can do whatever he wants, but as long as the BJP is in power and politics, it will not allow any disrespect of the North East's culture," the BJP leader said.

Assam is to hold elections this year, and Shah urged people to elect the BJP for a third consecutive term.

Shah accused the Congress of using infiltration as a "weapon of its vote bank politics".

Union Home Minister Amit Shah addresses a public meeting, in Dibrugarh, on Friday —*PTI*

"There has been no infiltration in Assam since the BJP came to power. Those who had come to India illegally will be identified and sent back," he added.

The Assam government, under BJP Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, has freed 1 lakh 26 thousand acres of land from infiltrators, he said.

Shah said that the recent free trade agreement (FTA) between India and the EU will ensure that Assam tea shipments will go to European countries with zero tariff. Dibrugarh is the tea capital of the country, he added. —*PTI*

Cong-DMK seat-sharing talks soon: TNCC chief

CHENNAI, 30 JAN

Denying any rift in Congress–DMK ties, Tamil Nadu Congress Committee President K Selvaperunthagai on Friday said the allies would begin seat-sharing negotiations within a week, expressing confidence that his party would secure its expected share.

DMK Deputy General Secretary Kanimozhi, who met Congress leader Rahul Gandhi earlier this week in New Delhi, said in Thoothukudi that initial discussions between the parties had been smooth. She added that DMK President and Chief Minister MK Stalin would announce the final arrangement after the talks conclude.

"We are not exerting pressure on our ally. We will ask and get what we want," Selvaperunthagai told reporters in Tiruvallur.

Referring to the Gandhi meeting, he said the engagement was "dignified", contrasting it with recent Ppposition meetings.

In the 2021 Assembly polls, the DMK allotted Congress 25 seats, of which it won 18. The process was set in motion last December when a five-member AICC delegation met Stalin in Chennai. —*PTI*

'WAS AIADMK CORRUPTION CLEANED IN BJP'S WASHING MACHINE?'

Tamil Nadu **Chief Minister MK Stalin** on Friday mounted a sharp attack on the BJP, asking whether its ally AIADMK, allegedly facing corruption cases, had been washed in the party's washing machine.

Speaking after inaugurating the NDTV Tamil Nadu Summit, Stalin accused the BJP of making baseless allegations against the DMK and spreading lies through "WhatsApp university". Rejecting charges of dynasty politics and corruption, he asked whether a single allegation against the DMK had been proven.

Turning the tables, he said the AIADMK, now aligned with the BJP, had even faced Supreme Court convictions in corruption cases. "When you were not in alliance with them, how many allegations did you make?" he asked.

Dismissing claims that Tamil Nadu is anti-Hindu, Stalin said consecrations had been held at over 4,000 temples during his tenure. —*PTI*

Cong starts MGNREGA stir on Martyrs' Day

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The Union government is continuously attacking the poor and undermining their statutory right to employment, the Congress' Delhi unit said Friday at a protest against the removal of the MGNREGA scheme.

Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh, who attended the "MGNREGA Bachao Sangram Yatra" event, said the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) gave legal right to employment benefiting lakhs of families but the the Centre was "eroding" these provisions.

The VB-G RAM G scheme dilutes the the UPA-era MGNREGA's original spirit, he said.

The Congress has launched a 45-day nationwide "MGNREGA Bachao Sangram Yatra" campaign, demanding the repeal of the VB-G RAM G Act.

Congress leaders and workers take part in a protest rally under 'MGNREGA Bachao Sangram', in New Delhi, on Friday —*PTI*

Meanwhile, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said Mahatma Gandhi is not just a person, but a way of thinking that an empire, an ideology of hatred and arrogance of power unsuccessfully tried to erase at different points in time.

Terming Mahatma Gandhi the "immortal soul of India", the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha paid tributes to the Father of the Nation on his death anniversary.

> **The Economic Survey has called for 're-examination' of the Right to Information Act... The Modi Government has systematically weakened the RTI Act... After killing MGNREGA, is it RTI's turn?**
>
> -Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress President

Meanwhile, Ramesh recalled two separate letters written in 1948 to Syama Prasad Mookerjee by Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in which they strongly criticised and raised questions over the activities of the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS. —*PTI*

MARTYRS' DAY

Himachal Pradesh observes a moment of silence to pay tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary, commemorated as Martyrs' Day, in Shimla —*PTI*

Manipur in limbo as President's Rule nears 1 year

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Speculation is rife over the BJP's next move in Manipur as President's Rule approaches one year next month, with no clear indication of re-installing a popular government. The 60-member assembly has been under suspended animation since 13 February, 2025, following months of ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities. The assembly's term ends in March 2027.

Several rounds of talks were held by BJP's Northeast coordinator Sambit Patra with Meitei and Kuki MLAs separately. On 14 December, 2025, BJP's national general secretary BL Santhosh and Patra met legislators from both communities, including over 30 BJP MLAs such as Speaker T Satyabrata Singh and ex-chief minister N Biren Singh. Four of the seven Kuki BJP MLAs attended, while three could not due to unavoidable reasons.

No word has been issued on the possibility of forming a government before the year's end. If one does not materialise in the coming weeks, Parliament will need to pass a statutory resolution during the ongoing budget session to extend the President's rule. —*PTI*

'IF IT HELPS GAZANS'

In India, Palestinian FM backs Trump Gaza 'Riviera'

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Palestine is open to US President Donald Trump's proposal to turn Gaza into a Mediterranean 'Riviera', but only if it benefits Palestinians and is not imposed at their expense, Palestinian Foreign Minister of State Varsen Aghabekian Shahin said on Friday.

"If it's a Riviera for Gazans, the Palestinians, to enjoy, yes. But if it's for others without the Palestinians, no," Shahin said.

Speaking in India, where she is attending the India-Arab Foreign Ministers' meeting, Shahin welcomed all peace initiatives, including Trump's proposed "Board of Peace", and said India's participation could help if the outcome and path were clearly defined.

"Any attempt at forging peace is welcome," she said, adding that rebuilding Gaza cannot be divorced from a credible process leading to a sovereign Palestinian state.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Varsen Aghabekian Shahin in New Delhi, on Friday —*PTI*

On Gaza, Shahin said the situation remains volatile despite a partial ceasefire.

"The ceasefire is fragile. Only a permanent and sustainable ceasefire will allow people to breathe and begin reconstruction," she said.

She said Hamas should disarm as part of an accepted peace framework and warned that escalating US-Iran tensions could undermine fragile regional calm.

Turning to the West Bank, Shahin said conditions were deteriorating, alleging violence by illegal settlers and violations of international law. Palestinians, she said, believe Trump could advance peace if rights are respected.

India has yet to decide on joining the board, while several countries have accepted invitations.

Meanwhile, Israel said it will open the Rafah crossing with Egypt on Sunday. — *PTI*

My stance not pro-BJP but pro-India, says Tharoor

T'PURAM, 30 JAN

- Tharoor appeared to break away from the party line after the Pahalgam terror attack last year

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said that his stand on certain issues may have been seen as pro-BJP by the media, but he sees it only as pro-India.

He said that he has made it clear that on some international matters he does not like to talk about politics but instead prefers to speak about the country.

A row had erupted over his comments on the India-Pakistan conflict and the outreach after the Pahalgam attack. His comments were at odds with the Congress' stand.

On whether he can categorically state he will not leave the Congress, Tharoor said, "I am going to be in the Congress."

Tharoor also hailed Rahul Gandhi as a "strong voice" against "communalism."

Tharoor said he never agreed with any unfair criticism of Rahul: "He is a sincere leader."

Tharoor admitted that a party member should not go against the party line, but insisted he stood by the Congress in the Parliament.

A thaw was visible in Tharoor's strained ties with Congress leaders after his meeting with Rahul on Thursday, with a source describing Tharoor as a star campaigner in the upcoming polls. "I will be part of the poll campaign (in Kerala)," Tharoor said. — *PTI*

—ANI

New Delhi's air quality remains poor

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The city recorded a minimum temperature of 7.7°C on Friday morning, with air quality classified as 'poor'. The maximum temperature is forecasted to be around 19°C. Stations like Palam recorded 6.7°C, below normal, while the city's overall AQI was 238. Seventeen stations reported 'poor' air quality, and RK Puram's AQI was 316, falling into the 'very poor' category. The CPCB states AQI between 201 and 300 is poor, and the weather department predicts light rain and thunderstorms over the next three days.—*PTI*

—SCREENGRAB

Four Naxals with Rs 8 lakh bounty surrender

SUKMA, 30 JAN

Four Naxalites, including two women with a combined bounty of Rs 8 lakh, surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district. They belonged to the Kistaram area committee of the south Bastar division of Maoists and surrendered under the state's 'Poona Margem' initiative, citing admiration for government rehabilitation policies. They handed over weapons including rifles and ammunition. Over 200 Maoists have surrendered this year, with the government aiming to eliminate Naxalism nationwide by 31 March. Security camps and massive anti-Naxalite operations have contributed to this. —*PTI*

Two more arrested in Kolkata fire case

KOLKATA, 30 JAN

Police have arrested two senior officials, Manoranjan Sheet and Raja Chakraborty, linked to the fire at a momo manufacturing unit and two warehouses at Anandapur. They were detained by Narendrapur police and will appear before the Baruipur court later today. Earlier, the premises owner Gangadhar Das was arrested. Police are questioning him to understand factory operations and responsible parties. So far, 21 body parts have been recovered, but the death toll remains unconfirmed pending DNA tests, officials said. "We cannot confirm the exact death toll at present as we have recovered only parts of human bodies, which may belong to a single or different individuals. This can be confirmed only after DNA tests," a police officer said. —*PTI*

—PTI

Filmmaker Pa Ranjith questions awards' credibility

CHENNAI, 30 JAN

Filmmaker Pa Ranjith has questioned the honesty of state and national award bodies following the announcement of Tamil Nadu's Film and Television Awards. He expressed doubts about whether these organisations operate with integrity, asking, "Do government and private award organisations, at both Tamil Nadu and national levels, truly operate with integrity?" The awards honoured industry figures from 2014 to 2022, including actors Dhanush, Vijay Sethupathi, Nayanthara, and Keerthy Suresh, highlighting the film industry's leading talents. —*ANI*

Stem cell therapy for autism is malpractice: SC

Use of stem cells legal only if it is an approved clinical trial

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The Supreme Court on Friday said that stem cell 'therapies' for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) cannot be offered by medical practitioners as a clinical service outside an approved and monitored clinical trial setting.

A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan said every use of stem cells in patients outside an approved clinical trial is "unethical" and shall be considered as "malpractice."

However, the bench said it does not wish to leave patients who are already undergoing the therapy in any apprehension that discontinuing the same may prove to be detrimental to their well-being.

"... At the same time, we are also sure of our decision that stem cell therapy for ASD cannot continue as a commercial act in the form of routine clinical treatment," it said.

The bench said, "Therefore, we direct the Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, in consultation with the officials of AIIMS and the National Medical Council, to provide the best possible solution in this regard to ensure that such patients are able to continue receiving the therapy till the time they can be re-routed to the institutions that are conducting clinical trials."

The Supreme Court said that stem cell therapy cannot be offered as a commercial service by any clinic —*FREEPIK/PTI*

The Supreme Court delivered the verdict on a plea that raised concerns about the rampant promotion, prescription and administration of stem cell 'therapy' for treatment of ASD by several clinics across the country.

"The reasons presented in the aforesaid discussion establish that stem cell 'therapies' for ASD cannot be offered by medical practitioners as a clinical service outside an approved and monitored clinical trial/research setting. In such a scenario, the regulation of such research gains primacy," the bench said.

Dealing with the issue of whether patient autonomy enables a person to give consent to an unproven treatment, the bench said, "We are of the view that a treatment cannot be demanded by a patient as a matter of right."

It said even though the patient may have voluntarily opted for such a procedure, such a choice does not amount to a valid consent to undergo the treatment due to the lack of "adequate information."

"Having said so, we clarify that one would still have the liberty to participate in an approved and regulated research/clinical trial involving stem cell therapy for ASD," it said.

The bench said until there is research which establishes this as a sound medical practice, stem cell 'therapies' for ASD cannot be offered by medical practitioners as a clinical service.

Referring to the Ethics and Medical Registration Board-National Medical Commission recommend ations of 6 December 2022, and other documents, it noted that they indicated that therapeutic use of stem cells for treating ASD was not recommended as a routine treatment. — *PTI*

PIL CHALLENGES DGCA FIAT

Why were norms on rest & leaves for pilots relaxed: HC

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The Delhi High Court on Friday questioned the DGCA on the "indefinite" relaxation given to airlines regarding the implementation of new norms on weekly rest and leaves for pilots.

Issuing notice on a public interest litigation (PIL), Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia asked DGCA to explain the "rationale" behind its decision to immediately withdraw the new flight-duty norm which said that no leave shall be substituted by weekly rest."

The bench asked the Directorate General of Civil Association's (DGCA) as well as IndiGo to file their response within two weeks.

On 5 December 2025, the DGCA rolled out the exemption to Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) to enable IndiGo to have more pilots on duty to normalise operations.

The DGCA counsel submitted on Friday that the regulator is monitoring the situation after the FDTL came into effect on 1 November 2025, and that the decision to withdraw was taken after an audit as well as representations from airlines on pilots clubbing the two types of offs.

She clarified that even after the 5 December decision, while weekly rest for pilots continued to be mandatory and is governed by CAR, leaves depended on the contract between a pilot and the airline. The DGCA counsel also said that a specific relaxation from night duty norms, through another letter issued on 5 December, was given to IndiGo till 10 February.

The court, however, asked that when a temporary relaxation was given for night duty norms to IndiGo, why was the norm on non-substitution of weekly rest and leaves withdrawn without any deadline.

The matter would be heard next in April. — *PTI*

No internet as Army beefs up anti-ultra op in Kishtwar

JAMMU, 30 JAN

Security forces intensified their anti-terror operation in the snowbound Chatroo belt on Friday to neutralise a group of three Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorists in the Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said.

They said mobile internet services were suspended within a radius of six km covering Singhpora, Chingam and Chatroo to avoid its misuse by anti-national elements during the operation.

The operation in the area was launched on 18 January, leading to a fierce encounter in the Sonnar forests near Mandral-Singhpora resulting in the killing of a paratrooper and injuries to seven soldiers.

Although the terrorists managed to escape using the thick vegetation and the challenging terrain as cover, the security forces continued their hunt despite more than two feet of snowfall.

Two more encounters took place between the army and the terrorists at Mali Dana top on 22 January and Janseer-Kandiwar on 25 January but the terrorists once again slipped deep into the forests.

Army soldiers conducting a search operation in the Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir on Friday —*ANI*

The suspension of mobile internet services in Singhpora, Chingam and Chatroo has been extended till 23:59 hours on 30 January, the officials said, quoting an order issued by the J-K Home Department.

The mobile internet services were suspended in the area on 23 January amid the army operation.

The decision was taken to prevent the misuse of high-speed mobile data services by anti-national elements.

Security forces launched a search in Pajja Morh and Nabana top in the Surankote area of Poonch district following a tipoff about the presence of two suspects. — *PTI*

Stop beef exports first: Shankaracharya tells Yogi

VARANASI, 30 JAN

Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati, who was allegedly prevented from taking a holy dip at the Sangam in Parayagraj, told Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday to stop beef exports from the state and declare cow as the "Rashtra Matha" to prove his Hindu credentials.

The seer had left the Magh Mela ground last Wednesday "with a heavy heart," ending his sit-in outside the Shankaracharya camp since 18 January over the issue of not being able to take the dip at the Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati river.

Speaking to reporters in Varanasi on Friday, the seer said, "When I sat there for 11 days, no official asked me to take a dip. Now it is too late. I will go to the Magh Mela next year." He also issued a challenge to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, asking him to stop cow slaughter within 40 days to prove his commitment to Hindus.

- The seer had left the Magh Mela last Wednesday "with a heavy heart," as he was unable to take the ritual bath at the Sangam of the three holy rivers

"Our credentials were asked for, and we submitted them. Now you have to give proof of being a Hindu," Avimukteshwaranand said.

On 18 January, Swami Avimukteshwaranand was riding a palanquin to the Sangam on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya, when a dispute broke out as the police asked him to dismount and proceed on foot, citing heavy crowds. — *PTI*

IndiGo flight diverted over bomb threat

AHMEDABAD, 30 JAN

An IndiGo flight from Kuwait to Delhi was diverted to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport in Ahmedabad on Friday after a passenger reported a bomb threat, airport officials said.

The aircraft, carrying 180 passengers, landed safely at around 6.40am. Authorities said a passenger found a handwritten note claiming the presence of a bomb on board. The pilot immediately informed air traffic control, and the flight was diverted.

All passengers were safely evacuated, and security personnel conducted a search. No suspicious items were discovered. The flight is expected to continue to Delhi after receiving clearance. — *PTI*

Paragliders fall in U'khand lake, rescued by SDRF

TEHRI, 30 JAN

A major accident was averted on Friday at the Acro Festival and SIV Championship in Koti Colony, in Tehri, Uttarakhand, when two paragliders fell into the Tehri lake but were rescued by the SDRF (State Disaster Response Fund).

Police said, the two paragliders lost control and fell into the Tehri lake. The SDRF teams deployed at Tehri lake rescued the paragliders.

Medical assessment confirmed that both pilots were safe. After administering first aid and medical examination, they were shifted to a secure location. — *PTI*

Court rejects bail of 3 accused of killing Zubeen

VARANASI, 30 JAN

A court here on Friday rejected the bail petitions of three of the accused in Zubeen Garg's death case, with the singer's wife pleading that bail should not be granted to any of them till the case is closed.

The Kamrup Metropolitan District and Sessions Court fixed 13 February as the next date of hearing, Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) Ziaul Kamar said.

Among the seven arrested in the case, three of them, Garg's band member Amritprava Mahanta and his two personal security officers (PSOs) Paresh Baishya and Nandeswar Bora, had earlier filed for bail.

Garg's wife Garima, who was present during the hearing, said she was glad that the bail petitions were rejected. While Mahanta is accused of murder, the two PSOs have been charged with criminal conspiracy and breach of trust by misappropriating funds entrusted to them.

Zubeen had died while swimming in the sea on 19 September in Singapore, where he had gone to attend the North East India Festival (NEIF). — *PTI*

SIT questions film actor Jayaram in Sabarimala shrine gold theft case

KOCHI, 30 JAN

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the alleged Sabarimala gold theft case has recorded a formal statement from actor Jayaram at his Chennai residence and is likely to list him as a key witness.

The SIT is investigating two cases involving the alleged loss of gold from the Dwarapalaka guardian deity idols and the doorframes of the Sreekovil sanctum sanctorum at the hill shrine. Jayaram was questioned after videos surfaced showing him attending a puja organised in Chennai in 2019 by prime accused Unnikrishnan Potti.

Meanwhile, the Kerala High Court has expressed strong displeasure over delays in the probe, noting that the SIT failed to file charge sheets within the mandatory 90-day period. As a result, key accused secured statutory or "default" bail this week.

On 23 January, a Kollam court granted statutory bail to former Travancore Devaswom Board administrative officer Murari Babu in two cases linked to the alleged gold loss. He was granted bail as 90 days had passed after his arrest without charge sheets being filed. Murari Babu, arrested in October on conspiracy charges, is the second accused in the Dwarapalaka idol case and the sixth accused in the Sreekovil doorframe case. He is in a jail at Thiruvananthapuram and is expected to be released on Friday. — *ANI*

MUMBAI'S SCAM ON WHEELS

Cabbie charges US lady Rs 18K for 400m ride

MUMBAI, 30 JAN

A 50-year-old taxi driver has been arrested for allegedly charging a US tourist a whopping Rs 18,000 in what may have been the most expensive 400-metre ride through the Mumbai traffic, police said on Friday.

The police on Tuesday apprehended Deshraj Yadav, who picked up the tourist from the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport and dropped her off at a five-star hotel.

The incident came to light after the tourist took to social media to share her experience about her expensive ride.

"Landed in Mumbai recently and took a taxi to @HiltonHotels. The driver and another guy took us to an unknown location first, charged us USD 200 (Rs 18,000), and then dropped us at the hotel, which was only 400 metres away. Taxi No: MH 01 BD 5405," Argentina Ariano (@ArgentinaAriano) wrote in a post on X.

Mumbai taxi driver Deshraj Yadav who was arrested for charging an US tourist Rs 18,000 for a 400-metre ride —*X/MUMBAI POLICE*

The police registered an FIR and nabbed Yadav within three hours. The foreigner, however, could not be contacted, the official said.

- The police on Tuesday apprehended Deshraj Yadav, who picked up the American tourist from the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport and dropped her off at a nearby five-star hotel

A probe revealed that the accused took the woman for a 20-minute drive around Andheri East before and dropping her at the hotel, where he collected the inflated fare, he said, adding that a search is underway for Yadav's accomplice.

A case has been registered against Yadav under BNS, and the process to cancel his driving licence is on. — *PTI*

H'YANA PANEL ORDERS PROBE INTO SLAPPING OF STUDENT

CHANDIGARH, 30 JAN

The Haryana Human Rights Commission (HHRC) has directed the Karnal district education officer to conduct an inquiry into alleged slapping of a student by a teacher in a private school in the city.

The order followed a complaint which alleged that the student was slapped in the presence of other students for a minor mistake causing severe mental trauma.

HHRC chairperson Justice Lalit Batra (rtd) in his order observed that the alleged conduct amounts to a gross violation of Sections 75 and 82 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, as well as Section 17 of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, which strictly prohibit corporal punishment.

- The order followed a complaint which alleged that the student was slapped in the presence of other students for a minor mistake causing severe mental trauma

It also directed the school's principal to submit a detailed report on the incident, action taken against the teacher, and steps to prevent recurrence of such incidents. — *PTI*

INDIA'S GIFT TO US LEADERS

The US State Department has released details of gifts presented by Indian leaders to US counterparts, including items from Prime Minister Narendra Modi to former president Joe Biden. These include a wood chest with scarf, saffron and tea valued at USD 562, and a sterling silver train set worth USD 7,750, both transferred to the National Archives. Modi also gifted Jill Biden a pashmina shawl and Kamala Harris a silver box
PHOTO: PTI

India torn over Trump's Gaza 'Board of Peace'

US President Donald Trump launched his so-called Board of Peace (BoP) initiative, which will attempt to cement the Israel-Hamas ceasefire in Gaza and oversee a transitional government in the Palestinian territory.

India is among dozens of nations that have received letters of invitation to join the board. However, it is not yet clear whether New Delhi will accept the offer.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has dramatically strengthened ties with Israel, becoming its largest weapons importer from 2020-2024, with bilateral trade reaching nearly $5 billion annually.

Yet, India simultaneously maintains its support for the "Palestinian cause."

In 1975, it became the first non-Arab country to recognise the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as "the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people."

New Delhi operates a representative office in the West Bank city of Ramallah, provides $5 million annually to the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), and consistently backs peace talks and a two-state solution to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

Trump's BoP could complicate India's established diplomatic approach.

President Donald Trump holds up a signed Board of Peace charter during the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland ***-PTI***

INDIA ASSESSES THE CHALLENGES OF JOINING

Foreign policy experts and diplomats are divided on whether India should join — with concerns ranging from institutional legitimacy to strategic costs.

"There are some serious issues that India will have to consider and walk a diplomatic tightrope," Muddassir Quamar, associate professor at the Center for West Asian Studies at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, told DW.

"While the diplomatic challenge of dealing with an unpredictable US President remains primary, the lack of clarity on the purview and structure of the BOP needs to be contemplated."

Quamar pointed to the reported $1 billion contribution required for permanent membership as a significant barrier, adding that India's commitment to a Palestinian state within the UN framework would weigh heavily.

However, he dismissed Pakistani involvement as a determining factor, suggesting India would likely consult regional partners like Israel and the UAE before deciding.

WHY EXPERTS URGE INDIA TO PARTICIPATE

TS Tirumurti, a retired diplomat and India's first representative to the Palestinian Authority, argues India should participate precisely because the board has UN Security Council approval and the region remains strategically vital.

"The BOP is not really challenging the UN," Tirumurti told DW.

"Given restricted representation, at best it will challenge the primacy of the G20, which also has restricted membership. Since the US wants the G20 to focus on economic issues, the BOP could become the geopolitical counterpart of the G20," he said.

Tirumurti dismissed fears that an unrepresentative body could substitute for the UN Security Council, arguing the board might eclipse it temporarily but cannot replace it.

More importantly, Tirumurti believes India's participation would amplify Global South concerns rather than undermine them.

"India's presence in any body has always been a voice of reason and pragmatism," he said.

"In addition to voicing our interests, India has usually voiced the concerns of the Global South. If India joins the board, I am confident that our role will be no different."

WHY OTHERS CAUTION AGAINST JOINING

Sameena Hameed, chairperson of the Center for West Asian Studies at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, takes the opposite view.

She argues India is unlikely to join due to legal ambiguity, uncertain prospects, and high political costs.

The proposed governance role lacks necessary stakeholder consent, she said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced on Wednesday that he accepted Trump's invitation to become a BoP member.

But Hamas, which remains active in Gaza and is engaged in violent power struggles with rival clans and groups, is "excluded entirely" from Trump's initiative, Hameed noted.

"Beyond Gaza, the board's reported extension to 'contested areas' erodes UN primacy in conflict management, setting a precedent India typically avoids," Hameed told DW.

"The board's institutional design vests disproportionate authority in the Chair, initially the US, with uneven member composition and asymmetrical decision-making rights," she said.

"This undermines its credibility as a genuine multilateral body."

She warned that participation carries steep costs, potentially damaging strategic relations with Israel while simultaneously denting India's principled Palestinian support.

Her recommendation is to maintain strategic ambiguity, as India has done effectively in the past to preserve foreign policy autonomy.

A PATH FORWARD

Ajay Bisaria, former high commissioner to Pakistan, offers conditional support. He warns that any attempt to use the board to revive a unipolar world order will face resistance, and expects the initiative's expansion beyond West Asia to fail given European pushback.

"India should tread cautiously, examining the fine print and negotiating terms before considering participation," Bisaria told DW.

He suggests India could join if the board remains focused on West Asia, potentially offering a medical contingent for Gaza in line with its peacekeeping tradition. "History suggests India won't rush," he said. *—PTI*

SALAR ساہر

What is Nipah virus, and why is it so deadly?

- An outbreak of the deadly Nipah virus in India has put many countries in Asia on high alert, given the fatality rate in humans can be between 40 per cent and 75 per cent. Several countries, including Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, have introduced new screening and testing measures, after at least two people died of Nipah virus in the Indian state of West Bengal this month.

An outbreak of the deadly Nipah virus in India has put many countries in Asia on high alert, given the fatality rate in humans can be between 40 per cent and 75 per cent. Several countries, including Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, have introduced new screening and testing measures, after at least two people died of Nipah virus in the Indian state of West Bengal this month.

But what is Nipah virus, and how concerned should we be?

Here's what you need to know.

WHAT IS NIPAH VIRUS?

Like Hendra virus, Nipah is in a category of viruses called henipaviruses. It is zoonotic, meaning it can spread from animals to humans.

As I explained in a previous Conversation article, outbreaks happen in Asia from time to time. The first outbreak was reported in 1998 in Malaysia.

There are three major ways it's transmitted.

The first is via exposure to bats, and in particular via contact with the saliva, urine or faeces of an infected bat. Infections can also occur from contact with other infected animals, such as pigs in the original outbreak in Malaysia.

The second way it can be transferred is by contaminated foods, particularly date palm products. This means consuming date palm juice or sap that is contaminated with the bodily fluids of infected bats.

The third is human-to-human transmission. Nipah transmission between humans has been reported via close contact such caring for a sick person. This can mean, for instance, being infected with bodily secretions contaminated with the virus in households or hospitals. This is thought to be less common than the other transmission pathways.

THE SYMPTOMS

Nipah virus infections happen quickly. The time from infection to symptoms appearing is generally from four days to three weeks.

It's a terrible disease. Around half the people who get severe Nipah virus infection die of it.

The symptoms can vary in severity. It can cause pneumonia, just as Covid could.

But the illness we worry most about is neurological symptoms; Nipah can cause encephalitis, which is inflammation of the brain.

These effects on the brain are why the fatality rate is so high.

Symptoms might include: fever, seizures, difficulty breathing, falling unconscious, severe headaches, being unable to move a limb,, jerky movements, personality changes, such as suddenly behaving oddly or psychosis.

Unusually, some patients who survive the acute phase of a Nipah infection can get relapsed encephalitis many years later, even more than a decade later.

IS THERE ANY TREATMENT, VACCINE?

Not yet, but in Australia development of a treatment called m102.4 is underway.

There was a phase 1 trial of this treatment published in 2020, which is where researchers give it to healthy people to see how it goes and if there are any side effects.

The trial found that a single dose of the treatment was well tolerated by patients.

So it is still quite a way off being actually available to help people infected with Nipah virus, but there's hope.

There is currently no vaccine for Nipah virus. In theory, m102.4 it could be a preventative but it's too early to say; at this point it is being trialled as a treatment.

HOW WORRIED SHOULD I BE?

This Nipah outbreak in India is worrying because there's currently no prevention and no treatment available, and it's a severe disease. While it is an important disease, it isn't likely to be a public health issue on the same scale as Coivd.

This is because it doesn't transmit efficiently from person to person, and the main way it is transmitted is from food and infected animals.

For people living outside of areas where cases are currently being reported, the risk is low. Even in the affected areas, the number of cases is small at this stage, but public health authorities are taking appropriate control measures. If you become unwell after travelling to areas where cases have been reported, you should let your doctor know where and when you travelled.

If someone gets a fever after travelling to affected areas, we would probably be much more worried it was caused by other infections such as malaria or typhoid than Nipah, at this stage. Overall, though, everything needs to be put in context. We hear about new viruses and incidents all the time. Nipah is important for affected countries, but outside of those countries, it is just something we closely monitor and be alert for. (The Conversation) *—PTI*

Unusually, some patients who survive the acute phase of a Nipah infection can get relapsed encephalitis many years later, even more than a decade later ***-PTI***

LETTERS

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US military action in Iran risks igniting a global nuclear cascade

The United States appears to be edging closer to military action against Iran. On 28 January 2026, President Donald Trump sharply escalated his rhetoric, warning that if Tehran failed to meet Washington's demands, the US could strike "with speed and violence". To underscore the threat, the Pentagon repositioned the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, along with destroyers, bombers and fighter jets, within striking distance of Iran.At the centre of US demands is a permanent end to Iran's uranium enrichment programme, alongside limits on ballistic missile development and an end to Tehran's support for regional proxy groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis. Trump appears to see an opening in Iran's economic malaise and the large-scale protests that swept the country in early January.

Yet from the perspective of Middle Eastern security and nuclear proliferation, a US strike at this moment risks severe and lasting unintended consequences. Chief among them is the danger of accelerating nuclear proliferation globally — regardless of whether Iran's current leadership survives.

The risks of destabilising a threshold state

Iran's collapse is far from assured, even under military pressure. With a population of around 93 million and substantial state capacity, it is not a fragile state prone to rapid disintegration. Its coercive apparatus is layered and resilient, anchored by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which commands or can mobilise forces numbering in the hundreds of thousands.

After nearly five decades in power, the Islamic Republic's institutions are deeply embedded in Iranian society. Any political transition would almost certainly be chaotic rather than transformative. As Secretary of State Marco Rubio conceded on 28 January, there is "no simple answer" to what would follow regime collapse. Iran's exiled opposition is fragmented, detached from domestic realities and lacks the organisational depth to govern a large, divided country.

This uncertainty is precisely where the danger lies. Iran is a nuclear "threshold state" — one with the technical capability to build nuclear weapons but which has stopped short of doing so. A destabilised threshold state presents three major risks: loss of centralised control over nuclear materials and scientists; incentives for factions to monetise or export expertise; and a rush to complete weapons programmes as actors seek deterrence before potential collapse.

Hezbollah supporters hold portraits of the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, during a rally to show their solidarity with the Iranian government in Lebanon ***-PTI***

History offers stark warnings. The dissolution of the Soviet Union raised grave concerns about loose nuclear material. The AQ Khan network later demonstrated how nuclear expertise can travel from Pakistan to North Korea, Libya and Iran.

What military strikes really teach

Any US military action would also send a powerful signal to other states weighing nuclear options. Iran's threshold status has been a strategic choice rooted in restraint. Yet the US-Israeli strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities in June 2025 — followed by renewed threats — suggest that remaining below the nuclear threshold offers no protection.

The lesson builds on decades of hard non-proliferation experience. Libya abandoned its nuclear programme in 2003, only for NATO airstrikes in 2011 to pave the way for Muammar Gaddafi's overthrow and death. Ukraine surrendered its nuclear arsenal in 1994 in exchange for security assurances — assurances that failed to prevent Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and full-scale invasion in 2022.

Now Iran joins the list: restraint did not spare it from attack. As Iranian adviser Mehdi Mohammadi bluntly put it on state television on 27 January, US demands amount to "disarming yourself so we could strike you when we want". If abandoning nuclear ambitions invites regime change, relinquishing weapons leads to invasion, and stopping at the threshold still triggers airstrikes, the conclusion for many states will be clear: security lies only in possessing the bomb. Should Iran's leadership endure a US attack, it is highly likely to accelerate — not abandon — its nuclear weapons programme.

Eroding the IAEA and global norms

US military action would also undermine the international non-proliferation architecture. Prior to the 2025 strikes, the International Atomic Energy Agency was functioning as intended — monitoring, detecting and verifying Iranian activity. Military action removes inspectors, disrupts oversight and sends a damaging message: compliance does not guarantee safety.

If adherence to rules offers no protection, incentives to cooperate collapse. The credibility of the IAEA — and faith in diplomacy as a means of managing nuclear risk — would suffer lasting harm.

A regional and global cascade

The implications would extend well beyond Iran. Saudi Arabia has openly stated it would pursue nuclear weapons if Iran does. Yet a US strike may unsettle rather than reassure Gulf allies, reinforcing perceptions that American protection is selective. Riyadh's deepening defence ties with nuclear-armed Pakistan already reflect hedging against regional instability.

Turkey, too, has periodically questioned why it should remain non-nuclear when others are not. A strike on Iran could accelerate Ankara's interest in an independent capability. Further afield, regional proliferation and fears of Iranian know-how spreading could prompt South Korea and Japan to re-examine their reliance on US extended deterrence. *—PTI*

Trump threatens Canada with 50% tariff on aircrafts

WASHINGTON, 30 JAN

US President Donald Trump on Thursday threatened Canada with a 50 per cent tariff on aircraft sold in the US, escalating his trade feud with Prime Minister Mark Carney.

In a social media post, Trump said the move would retaliate for Canada's refusal to certify jets built by Savannah, Georgia-based Gulfstream Aerospace, and warned the US would decertify Canadian aircraft. He said he was "hereby decertifying" Bombardier Global Express business jets and would impose the tariff if the issue was not "immediately corrected". Around 150 Global Express aircraft are registered in US, according to Cirium. Bombardier and Gulfstream are direct rivals. Bombardier said it was in contact with the Canadian government and that its aircraft meet Federal Aviation Administration standards. Aviation expert John Gradek of McGill University said certification is about safety and that decertification for trade reasons would be unprecedented, calling it "a new salvo in the trade war". The threat echoes a 2017 US case accusing Bombardier of unfair subsidies, later rejected by US International Trade Commission.

TRUMP THREATENS TARIFFS FOR SELLING OIL TO CUBA

Trump on Thursday signed an executive order to impose a tariff on any goods from countries that sell or provide oil to Cuba. In response, Mexico this week temporarily stopped oil shipments to Cuba. He has been squeezing Mexico to distance itself from Cuban government. *—AGENCIES*

PTI

Bangladesh flight lands in Karachi after 14 years

LAHORE/KARACHI, 30 JAN

A Bangladesh Airlines flight from Dhaka landed in Karachi on Thursday, restoring non-stop air links after 14 years. The Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight was welcomed with a water salute upon arrival at Jinnah International Airport. This development marks the start of a new chapter in Pakistan-Bangladesh relations, with flights scheduled twice weekly, initially under test licence until 30 March. The route will operate on Thursdays and Saturdays, with departure from Dhaka at 8.00pm local time and arriving in Karachi at 11.00pm. The return flight leaves Karachi at midnight, arriving in Dhaka at 4.20am. The resumption follows high-level talks aimed at boosting trade and ties after strained ties. *—PTI*

Man impersonates FBI agent to free Luigi from jail

NEW YORK, 30 JAN

A man claiming to be an FBI agent attempted to free Luigi Mangione from New York's Metropolitan Detention Center on Wednesday night. Mark Anderson, 36, from Minnesota, approached jail officers asserting he had a court order for Mangione's release, showing a fake FBI badge and a Minnesota driver's licence. He also claimed to possess weapons and threw documents at officers. Officers found a barbecue fork and a small steel blade in his bag. Anderson, who was working at a pizzeria, travelled from Mankato, Minnesota. The attempt occurred during a critical phase of Mangione's legal cases related to the murder of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson. Anderson is expected in Brooklyn court, with Mangione's supporters rallying for his release. *—PTI*

Hope we won't have to strike Iran: Don

Iran seeks talks as Trump briefed on troops

WASHINGTON, 30 JAN

US President Donald Trump and Melania Trump at the premiere of 'Melania', a documentary based on the First Lady, in Washington on Thursday—*PTI*

US President Donald Trump said that he hoped to avoid military confrontation with Iran, as the US builds up its forces in the Gulf.

"I built (up) the military in my first term, and now we have a group headed out to a place called Iran, and hopefully we won't have to use it," Trump told reporters at the premiere of a documentary about his wife, Melania on Thursday.

Asked if he would have talks with Iran, Trump added, "I have had and I am planning on it. Yes, we have a lot of very big, very powerful ships sailing to Iran right now, and it would be great if we didn't have to use them."

Trump also laid out two conditions to prevent military escalation: "Number one, no nuclear. And number two, stop killing protesters." Trump added that "they are killing them by the thousands".

The comments come as the US has deployed the massive carrier USS Abraham Lincoln near Iran with at least three destroyers and several fighter jets.

Iran, meanwhile, has said that it has its "finger on the trigger" in the case of a military strike and threatened several American military bases in the region.

Trump has also been briefed an aggressive range of military options, including placing American troops on the ground, such as targeted raids against key facilities, officials said.

The proposed military actions are designed to inflict deeper damage on Iran's nuclear and missile infrastructure or to undermine the authority of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, reflecting an escalation in planning compared with options reviewed earlier this month.

However, diplomacy has not been ruled out yet.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has flown to Ankara to meet Turkish diplomats. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is trying to set up a meeting between Trump and his Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian. *—AGENCIES*

Democrats, White House strike deal to avert shutdown

WASHINGTON DC, 30 JAN

Democrats and the White House struck a deal on Thursday to avert a partial government shutdown, agreeing to fund the Department of Homeland Security for two weeks while talks continue on limits to President Trump's immigration enforcement.

The agreement follows Democrats blocking a broader spending bill amid outrage over the fatal shootings of Alex Pretti and Renee Good by ICE agents in Minnesota. Homeland Security funding would be split from the wider package to allow negotiations on curbs to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Democrats want limits on ICE patrols, tighter warrant rules, coordination with local police and an enforceable code of conduct, including body cameras. Republicans say two weeks may be insufficient, while House conservatives oppose any changes proposed. *— PTI*

Trump nominates Kevin Warsh as new Fed Chair

WASHINGTON, 30 JAN

- The Federal Reserve chair is one of the world's most powerful economic officials, responsible most notably overseeing the Unites State's banking system.

US President Donald Trump said Friday that he plans nominate former Federal Reserve governor **Kevin Warsh** to be the next Chair of the central banking agency. The appointment requires Senate confirmation.

The Federal Reserve Chair is one of the world's most powerful economic officials, responsible for fighting inflation, supporting employment, and most notably overseeing the US's banking system.

The appointment marks a return for Warsh, who had served as the Fed's youngest-ever governor from 2006 to 2011, during which he was known for opposing low-interest policies.

Trump has said the Fed's key rate should be as low as 1 per cent, far below its current level of about 3.6 per cent.

Trump appointed Jerome Powell to lead the Fed in 2017 but has criticized him this year for not cutting rates fast enough.

Warsh is an unlikely choice given his support for higher interest rates to control inflation. However since Trump's reelection, Warsh has expressed support for the President's economic policies, despite a history as a more conventional, pro-free trade Republican.

For now, Warsh would fill a seat on the Fed's governing board temporarily held by Stephen Miran, who was appointed by Trump in September. Once on the board, Trump could elevate Warsh to Chair when Powell's term ends in May.

Warsh's appointment would let Trump exert more control over the Fed, whose independence has been questioned amid his attacks on the central bank.

Since his first term, Trump has broken precedent by publicly calling for rate cuts and seeking greater control over the Fed, including attempting to fire governor Lisa Cook and appointing three others, two of which were during his first term. *—PTI*

British PM Starmer meets with students from Shanghai International College of Fashion during a visit to Yuyuan Garden on Friday *—PTI*

STARMER ARRIVES IN SHANGHAI AMID TRUMP THREATS

BEIJING, 30 JAN

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer arrived in China's Shanghai, on Friday.

Starmer's arrival comes just hours after US President Donald Trump signalled a possible opposition to any deal between Beijing and London, saying, "it's very dangerous for them to do that," referencing potential UK-China trade talks.

Starmer brought more than 50 business leaders on his trip to China, in his bid to boost business opportunities for UK firms in China.

Starmer began his trip in Beijing, where he and President Xi Jinping pledged a long-term strategic partnership, signaling improving ties after years of friction.

Starmer and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney are among foreign leaders visiting Beijing seeking to improve ties with China.

Many countries' economies buffeted by Trump's tariffs are looking to expand other export markets. *—PTI*

Venezuela opens oil sector, US eases sanctions

CARACAS/ WASHINGTON, 30 JAN

Acting President Rodriguez holds up a new oil privatisation law at a rally at Miraflores Palace in Caracas, Venezuela on Thursday *—PTI*

Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodríguez on Thursday signed a major bill less than two hours after the National Assembly approved it. The bill opens Venezuela's oil sector to privatisation. Meanwhile, US Treasury officially began to ease economic sanctions on Venezuelan oil.

The law gives private companies control over oil production and sales, ending the state-owned monopoly , while keeping ownership of hydrocarbon reserves with the state. Companies will manage operations at their own expense. The law also permits independent arbitration, ending the requirement that disputes be heard only in Venezuelan courts.

President Donald Trump has said the US intends to indefinitely control Venezuela's oil sales and revenues following the 3 January US military raid in Caracas that seized then-president Nicolás Maduro. The reform is set to become the Rodríguez government's signature policy, repositioning Venezuela's oil sector to attract foreign investment and revive the long-crippled industry.

In November, as Trump escalated pressure on Maduro, he declared the airspace "above and surrounding" Venezuela effectively closed. However, Trump said he instructed his transportation secretary, Sean Duffy, and US military leaders to take steps to open the airspace for travel by the end of the day. *—PTI*

Ukrainians hopeful Putin will stop attacks for 1 week

KYIV, 30 JAN

Ukrainian people awaited signs on Friday that Russia agreed to US President Donald Trump's claims that Moscow would stop targeting their power grid for a week as Kyiv and other regions are gripped by the bitterest winter weather for years.

The Kremlin said that Trump "personally" requested Russian President Vladimir Putin to not strike Ukraine for a week.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was skeptical about Putin's readiness for such a step as Russia's all-out invasion approaches its four-year anniversary next month.

"I do not believe that Russia wants to end the war. There is a great deal of evidence to the contrary," Zelenskyy said.

However, if Moscow halts its bombardment, Zelenskyy said, Ukraine will suspend its attacks on Russia's energy infrastructure, including its oil refineries.

Kyiv, which recently has endured severe power shortages, is forecast to enter a brutally cold stretch starting on Friday that is expected to last into next week. Temperatures in some areas will drop to minus 30 degrees Celsius. Zelenskyy said that the temporary halt was discussed during the trilateral US-Russia-Ukraine meeting last weekend in Abu Dhabi. *—PTI*

Kurdish forces, Syrian govt forces reach integration deal

Thousands evacuated from Syria's Aleppo amid clashed between the government and the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces *—SANA*

QAMISHLI, 30 JAN

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced that central government intended to stabilize a ceasefire that ended weeks of fighting.

Security forces affiliated with the Syrian Ministry of Interior will visit al-Hassakeh and Qamishli in the Kurdish heartland to begin the process of integrating SDF and government forces.

This would include formation of a new military brigade comprising three brigades from the SDF, in addition to a brigade of SDF fighters within a government brigade in Aleppo province.

Local institutions in the Kurdish-led government of northeast Syria — which has operated as a de facto autonomous zone for years — and their employees would be integrated into state institutions.

The agreement includes "civil and educational rights for the Kurdish people, and guaranteeing the return of the displaced to their areas."

"The agreement aims to unify the Syrian territories and achieve the full integration process in the region by enhancing cooperation between the concerned parties and unifying efforts to rebuild the country," it said.

The SDF lost most of its territory in northeast Syria to a government offensive after intense clashes erupted in Aleppo on 6 January, following months of failed negotiations.

A truce was reached last week between the government forces and the SDF. *—PTI*

'REPUTATIONAL HARM'

Trump sues IRS for $10B over leaked '$750 tax' records

WASHINGTON, 30 JAN

President Donald Trump, his two eldest sons, and his family business are suing the IRS and the Treasury Department for USD 10 billion, citing the agencies' failure to prevent the leak of that confidential tax information to news outlets. The suit was filed in a Florida federal court on Thursday.

Leaked records famously revealed that Donald Trump paid only USD 750 in federal income taxes in both 2016, the year he won the presidency, and 2017, his first year in office. Even more striking, the reports showed he paid no federal income taxes at all in 10 of the previous 15 years.

The lawsuit follows the 2024 sentencing of former IRS contractor Charles Edward Littlejohn, who received five years in prison after pleading guilty to stealing and leaking tax data to The New York Times—acts prosecutors called "unparalleled in the IRS's history."

The President's suit comes shortly after the US Treasury Department announced earlier this week that it terminated its contracts with Booz Allen Hamilton. The move was a direct response to the breach involving Littlejohn, who compromised the records of thousands of the country's wealthiest individuals in addition to the President.

Trump's lawsuit alleges that the disclosures "caused reputational and financial harm to Plaintiffs and adversely impacted President Trump's support among voters in the 2020 presidential election."

Representatives for the Treasury and the IRS were not immediately available for comment. *—PTI*

Panama ports' deal with Hong Kong firm ruled unconstitutional

PANAMA CITY, 30 JAN

Panama's Supreme Court has ruled that the concession held by a subsidiary of Hong Kong's CK Hutchison Holdings to operate ports at either end of the Panama Canal is unconstitutional.

The court's ruling followed an audit by Panama's comptroller, which alleged irregularities in the 25-year extension of the concession granted in 2021. The Trump administration made blocking China's influence over the Panama Canal one of its priorities.

Despite the Panama's government and the canal authority denying China's influence over its operations, US State Secretary Marco Rubio made it clear that the US viewed the operation of the ports as a national security issue. It is unclear on what will happen to the ports now. *—PTI*

Unwed couple canned 140 times for having sex

INDONESIA, 30 JAN

The woman being flogged in public

PHOTO: X

Sharia police in the Aceh province of Indonesia on Thursday caned a couple 140 times each for having sex outside marriage and drinking alcohol, one of the harshest punishments imposed since the conservative region adopted Islamic law.

Aceh is the only province in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, to enforce a version of sharia, which strictly outlaws sexual relations between unmarried couples.

An AFP reporter said the man and woman were struck on their backs with a rattan stick in a public park as dozens watched. The woman fainted after the punishment and was taken away in an ambulance.

The pair received 100 lashes for sex outside marriage and 40 for consuming alcohol, Banda Aceh Sharia police chief Muhammad Rizal told AFP. Aceh introduced sharia after receiving special autonomy in 2001, and the punishment is believed to be among the highest since.

The couple were among six people flogged, including a sharia police officer and his female partner caught together in a private place. They received 23 lashes each.

Rizal said, "We make no exceptions, including our own members", publicly enforced. *—Agencies*

- SPICEJET

SpiceJet to connect Imphal with Kolkata, Mumbai

GUWAHATI, 30 JAN

Budget carrier SpiceJet on Friday said it will enter Imphal with the launch of its first-ever flight services to the Manipur capital, strengthening air connectivity to the Northeast. Starting 10 February, SpiceJet will operate daily flights to Imphal from Kolkata, Guwahati and Mumbai, using Boeing 737 aircraft. Passengers flying from Kolkata and Guwahati will benefit from non-stop services, while those travelling from Mumbai will enjoy a single-aircraft journey with a short stopover in Kolkata, eliminating the need to change aircraft, the company said. The new services will also enable convenient onward connections via SpiceJet's network to multiple destinations across India and select international points making Manipur more accessible. *—PTI*

CPI revision to increase inflation by 20-30bps: SBI

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

After the revision of the consumer price index (CPI) base year, CPI inflation is expected to rise by 20-30 basis points (bps), a report by SBI Ecowrap stated. However, in months when food inflation is higher, the new CPI could be 20-30 bps lower than the earlier series. The findings come in the backdrop of the revision of the CPI base year to 2023-24 from 2011-12. The new CPI 2024 series will consist of 358 weighted items mapped across 12 divisions, 43 groups, 62 classes and 192 sub-classes. The first CPI 2024 data release will take place on 12 February 12. In addition, the All-India level back series for rural, urban and combined sectors, starting from January 2013, will also be released. *—ANI*

India-EU FTA to give mkt access to exporters: Moody

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The agreement with the European Union (EU) will help India diversify its trade relationships and provide greater market access to its exporters amid growing uncertainty due to high US tariffs, Moody's Ratings has said. The free trade agreement (FTA) between India and the EU was signed on January 27. It is likely to be implemented this year only. "For India, the deal reflects its continued efforts to selectively diversify trade relationships while hedging against trade volatility arising from recent US tariff actions," Moody's said adding that the agreement will strengthen India's access to the EU market in sectors such as textiles, leather, marine products, and gems and jewellery. For the EU, the deal strengthens economic security. *—PTI*

Budget to stress on managing debt-to-GDP ratio

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The upcoming Budget is going to put emphasis on easing the 56 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio, instead of targeting a specific fiscal deficit number. A fiscal deficit of 3-4 per cent is considered a desirable target for a developing economy like India, aiming to balance economic expansion with financial stability. Under the revised Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, the fiscal deficit target was below 4.5 per cent of GDP for 2025-26. The Union government announced a new glide path with the debt-to-GDP ratio as the fiscal anchor in the FRBM statement. It encourages a shift from rigid annual fiscal targets towards more transparent and flexible fiscal standards. This strategy would help rebuild buffers and create a suitable situation for growth-enhancing expenditures. *—PTI*

Silver falls 17% in worst crash in 15 years

Gold records worst day since 2013 as it plunges by 9%

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Prices of silver and gold saw one of their steepest single-day fall in the past few months in futures trade on Friday as investors rushed to monetise their peaking investment value.

Silver futures crashed 17 per cent to Rs 3.32 lakh per kg, its worst in 15 years. Gold tanked 9 per cent to Rs 1.54 lakh per 10g , tracking weak trends in the global markets and surging American currency. This is the lowest that gold prices have fallen since 2013.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), silver futures for March delivery plummeted by Rs 67,891, or 16.97 per cent, to Rs 3,32,002 per kg, marking its steepest fall in a single day.

The metal surged about 9 per cent to hit a record of Rs 4,20,048 per kg on Thursday, before settling at Rs 3,99,893 per kg.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange, silver futures for march delivery fell by Rs 67, 891 or 16,7 per cent to Rs 3,32,002 per kilogram —ANI

Similarly, gold futures also tumbled as investors booked heavy profits on the commodities bourse. The February contract nosedived by Rs 15,246, or 9 per cent, to Rs 1,54,157 per 10g.

On Thursday, the yellow metal soared nearly 9 per cent, to a new peak of Rs 1,80,779 per 10 grams, before easing to Rs 1,69,403 per 10g on the MCX.

- In the international market, silver futures on the Comex for March delivery nosedived by USD 19.30 to hit an intraday low of USD 95.12 per ounce.

Gold and silver exchange traded funds (ETFs) have dropped up to 20 per cent in the domestic markets.

In the international market, silver futures on the Comex for March delivery nosedived by USD 19.30, or 16.87 per cent, to hit an intraday low of USD 95.12 per ounce. It touched a record of USD 121.78 per ounce in the previous session.

Gold futures on the Comex for April delivery also plummeted by USD 392.1, or 7.32 per cent, to USD 4,962.7 per ounce, after it hitting an all-time high of USD 5,626.8 per ounce on Tuesday *—PTI*

- FREEPIK

Rupee hits lowest-ever of 92.02 against USD

MUMBAI, 30 JAN

The rupee on Friday hit its record low of 92.02 before ending a tad higher at 91.97 against the US dollar, amid a firm American currency and volatile geopolitical cues.

Forex traders said sustained withdrawal of foreign funds and a negative trend in domestic equities weighed on investor sentiment.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 91.89 and gained ground, touching 91.82 against the greenback during intraday trade.

The currency touched its lowest-ever level of 92.02 before ending the session at 91.97 against the dollar, registering a gain of just 2 paise form previous closing level.

On Thursday, the rupee ended flat at its lowest level of 91.99 against the dollar. The currency recorded its previous lowest level of 92-a-dollar on January 23.

"Indian rupee recovered from all-time lows on an overnight decline in crude oil and commodity prices.

However, recovery in the US dollar index and FII outflows capped sharp gains. Dollar index rose after Donald Trump said that he would announce his nominee to head the US Federal Reserve," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Mirae Asset ShareKhan.

Meanwhile, the dollar index was trading 0.45 per cent higher at 96.57. *—PTI*

WINS JCR RATINGS

Japan opens doors for Adani to secure long-term capital

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The Adani Group has won credit ratings from Japan Credit Rating Agency (JCR) for three of its companies, which may help it to access Japan's debt markets.

JCR has assigned long-term foreign currency credit ratings with a stable outlook to Adani Ports & SEZ Ltd (APSEZ), Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL), and Adani Energy Solutions Ltd (AESL).

APSEZ received an A- (Stable) rating, while AGEL and AESL were each rated BBB+ (Stable).

The rating places APSEZ among a small group of Indian companies that have breached the sovereign threshold in global ratings.

JCR cited APSEZ's stable cash flows from long-term concessions, robust operating capabilities, and prudent financial management.

The company's earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA) grew to Rs 19,025 crore in FY25, with Rs 11,046 crore in H1 FY26.

While AGEL's EBITDA grew to Rs 10,532 crore in FY25, AESL's EBITDA stood at Rs 7,747 crore in FY25.

The new ratings could make Adani credits accessible to a wider range of Japanese institutional investors, including insurers and pension funds.

ADANI GROUP FIRM TO SWAP DOLLAR DEBT WITH RUPEE

The Adani Electricity, Mumbai plans to refinance part of its dollar debt with the rupee funding over the next three months. It has dollar bonds worth $831 million and $ 255 million maturing in February 2030 and July 2031 respectively. It will use the ratings for Rs 10 billion of to repay part of the debt.

—Agencies

B'desh appoints UK law firm in Adani coal dispute case

DHAKA, 30 JAN

Bangladesh has appointed a British law firm to represent state-run Power Development Board (BPDB) in mediation proceedings over its disputes with Adani Power Limited's coal pricing and power tariffs.

The BPDB officials said on Friday they appointed London-based 3VP, a leading law firm providing commercial and financial litigation, to represent Bangladesh in the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC), a court of international arbitration.

The Bangladesh-based Business Standard (TBS) newspaper said the 3VP chambers, headed by King's Counsel Farhaz Khan, had been advising a national review committee on the Adani deal for several months.

The development came in less than a week, within five days of the committee submitting its final report detailing power sector agreements signed during the deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's toppled Awami League government.

"But we believe you will get strong evidence of corruption when a legal process begins at home and abroad against Adani and its associate companies involved in this fraud," BSS reported quoting its member. *—PTI*

Markets snap 3-day rally dragged by metal, IT

MUMBAI, 30 JAN

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Friday, snapping a three-day rally, dragged by metal, IT stocks and caution ahead of the Budget presentation on February 1.

Fresh foreign fund outflows and weakness in the rupee also added to the bearish trend in the equity markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 296.59 points or 0.36 per cent to settle at 82,269.78. During the day, it tumbled 625.34 points or 0.75 per cent to 81,941.03.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 98.25 points or 0.39 per cent to end at 25,320.65.

From the Sensex firms, Tata Steel tanked the most by 4.57 per cent. ICICI Bank, Power Grid, HCL Tech, Tech Mahindra, Infosys and Kotak Mahindra Bank were also among the laggards.

BSE Sensex declined 296.59 points to settle at 82.267.78, while NSE Nifty dropped 98.25 points to end at 25,320.65 *—PTI*

Mahindra & Mahindra, State Bank of India, ITC and Bharat Electronics were among the gainers.

Foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth Rs 393.97 crore on Thursday after a day's breather, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) however, bought stocks worth Rs 2,638.76 crore.

India's economy is projected to grow by 6.8-7.2 per cent in the fiscal year starting April, the government's pre-Budget Economic Survey said on Thursday, reaffirming the country's status as the world's fastest-growing major economy despite trade risks and global volatility clouding the outlook. *—PTI*

Swiggy shares dip 8% post Q3 earnings

Shares of food delivery and quick commerce major Swiggy, which owns Instamart, on Friday tumbled nearly 8 per cent after the firm reported a widening of its losses for the third quarter ended December at Rs 1,065 crore. The stock tanked 7.68 per cent to Rs 302.25 on the BSE. At the NSE, the stock dropped 7.78 per cent to Rs 302.15. Swiggy on Thursday reported a widening of its losses for the third quarter ended December at Rs 1,065 crore, as losses from the quick commerce segment continued and rising advertising and sales expenditure. *—PTI*

TO RAISE RS 10,000 CR

Sebi approves NSE IPO after decade-old delay

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Markets regulator Sebi has granted a no-objection certificate (NOC) to the country's largest bourse, National Stock Exchange (NSE), to proceed with its long-awaited public listing, an official said on Friday.

NSE's initial public offering (IPO) plans had been stalled for more than a decade.

The exchange first filed its draft offer documents in 2016 to raise about Rs 10,000 crore through an offer for sale by existing shareholders. However, Sebi did not grant approval due to regulatory concerns related to governance lapses and the co-location case.

Since then, NSE had approached the regulator multiple times seeking clearance.

Earlier this month, Sebi chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey said the regulator had given "in-principle" approval to the settlement plea filed by NSE in the unfair market access case, an important development seen as paving the way for the approval of the exchange's IPO.

NSE had filed the settlement application in June 2025.

In March 2025, the market regulator constituted an internal committee to examine the listing plan of NSE. *—PTI*

Google India posts Rs 1,436.9 cr 'flat' profit

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Google India has posted a flat profit of Rs 1,436.9 crore on standalone basis in the financial year 2025 due to decline in revenue and increase in employee and tax expenses.

According to a regulatory document shared by market intelligence firm Tofler, the company had posted a total profit after tax of around Rs 1,425 crore a year ago.

The revenue from operations of Google India declined by 3.2 per cent to Rs 5,340 crore during the reported fiscal from Rs 5,518 crore in FY24.

- GOOGLE

Total revenue of Google India, however, increased by 3.2 per cent to Rs 6,116 crore from Rs 5,921 crore on YoY basis, an account of "other income" of around Rs 776 crore. Email query sent to Google India elicited no immediate response.

According to the analysis done by Tofler, net margin of Google India also declined 23.49 per cent on year-over-year (YoY) basis from 24.06 per cent.

"The company's total expenses for the fiscal were reported as Rs 4,136 crore," Tofler said.

The company posted 7.8 per cent increase in employee benefit expense to about Rs 2,146 crore in FY25 from Rs 1,989 crore a year ago. *—PTI*

Nestle India Q3 profit rises 45.12%

FMCG major Nestle India on Friday reported a 45.12 per cent rise in consolidated net profit at Rs 998.42 crore in the third quarter ended 31 December, 2025 on the back of a nearly five-year high volume growth driving its highest-ever quarterly revenue. The company had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 688.01 crore in the corresponding period last fiscal, Nestle India said. Consolidated revenue from operations in the third quarter stood at Rs 5,667.04 crore. *—PTI*

Facebook India sees Rs 647 cr profit

Facebook India has posted around 28 per cent increase in standalone profit at Rs 647.45 crore for financial year ended March 2025. According to the company's regulatory filing shared by Tofler, market intelligence firm, the company had logged a profit of Rs 504.93 crore a year ago. Revenue from operations grew 25 per cent to Rs 3,792.91 crore in FY2025 from Rs 3,034.82 a year ago. "The company's total expenses for the fiscal were reported as Rs 2,881 crore," said Tofler. *—PTI*

2ND LARGEST MARKET

Apple posts profits in India as iPhone sale rises

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Apple recorded "strong double-digit revenue" growth in India during the December quarter of 2025, highlighting the country's role in the iPhone maker's global expansion strategy, CEO Tim Cook said.

Apple had posting record revenue in Q1 FY26 from iPhone, Mac, iPad, and services. The performance came despite Apple still holding a relatively modest market share in the country.

"The majority of customers buying iPhone, Mac, iPad, and Watch are using the product for the first time, which points to the opportunity there," said Cook.

India is currently the world's second-largest smartphone market and the fourth-largest PC market. The company has been expanding in retail and manufacturing here.

Apple opened its fifth store in Noida in December and plans to open another in Mumbai soon.

Apple reported its best quarter in Q1 FY26, with revenue rising 16% year-on-year to $143.8 billion. iPhone revenue jumped 23% YoY to $85.3 billion. It plans to expand its services portfolio too. *—Agencies*

3 pharma ingredients face import curbs

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The government has imposed a minimum import price on three components used in the production of penicillin-class antibiotics - Penicillin G-potassium, 6-APA, and Amoxicillin Trihydrate, according to a notification.

These three ingredients have been kept under the restricted category for one year.

"The import of Penicillin G-potassium...,6-APA...and Amoxicilline Trihydrate..., having CIF (cost, insurance, freight) value of less than Rs 2,216 per kilogram, Rs 3,405 per kilogram, and Rs 2,733 per kilogram respectively, are restricted for a period of one year from the date of publication of this notification," Directorate General of Foreign Trade said. The restriction will not be applicable for imports by 100 per cent export-oriented units, units in thespecial economic zones and imports under advance authorisation scheme. *—PTI*

DJOKOVIC reaches 38th Grand Slam final

Novak Djokovic will face Carlos Alcaraz in Sunday's men's singles final of the 2026 Australian Open —EAO

Djokovic beat Sinner 3-6 6-3 4-6 6-4 6-4 in four hours and nine minutess

MELBOURNE, 30 JAN

Chasing an11th Australian Open title, the Serbian overcame Sinner 3-6, 6-3, 4-6,6-4, 6-4 on Friday to reach his first Grand Slam final since Wimbledon2024.

Djokovic beat Alcaraz togold at Paris 2024, although it was the Spaniard who won their mostrecent meeting at Flushing Meadows en route to winning the USOpen last year.

"I'm lost for words," said a visibly emotional Djokovic as thecrowd chanted his name."It feels surreal.

Playing over four hours, almost 2 am... Thequality of tennis was extremely high, and I know that was the only way I'd havea chance to win against him. He won his last five matches against me. He had mymobile number, so I had to change my mobile tonight."I have tremendous respect for him; he pushes you to the verylimit, which is what he did to me.

Eighteen years after his first Melbourne crown, Djokovic will strive for a record-extending 11th against Alcaraz and the unprecedented 25th Grand Slam title that has eluded him.

Djokovic needed incredible fortune to reach the semifinal, with his quarterfinal opponent, Lorenzo Musetti, retiring injured after taking the first two sets.

The Serb enjoyed a walkover in the fourth round as well, when Jakub Mensik pulled out.

But it was hard work and mental toughness that got Djokovic over the line against Sinner, a player who had beaten him in their previous five matches.

World No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz battled an injury scare to overcome Alexander Zverev in five sets to make maiden Australian Open final. In a match that lasted five hours and 27 minutes, the Spaniard edged out the 28-year-old German 6-4, 7-6(5), 6-7(3), 6-7(4), 7-5 at the Rod Laver Arena. Alcaraz will now face Novak Djokovic (the 10-time king of Melbourne). Djokovic battles past Sinner to reach 38th Grand Slam final

At just 22, the Spaniard is bidding to become the youngest man in history to complete the Career Grand Slam-a feat that would see him eclipse even the legendary Rafael Nadal

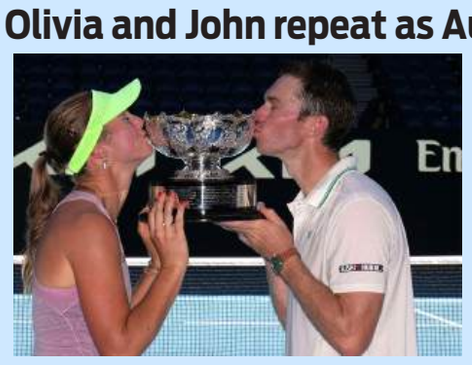
Zverev criticises Alcaraz's medical time-out after semi-final loss

Alexander Zverev condemned officials for allowing Carlos Alcaraz a medical time-out for a leg problem after falling in an epic five-setter to the Spaniard in the Australian Open's longest semifinal on Friday.

World number one Alcaraz was struggling to move at 4-4 in the third set and was allowed treatment on his right thigh at the change of ends, leaving German Zverev incensed.Zverev was adamant that Alcaraz was struggling with cramp, which is out-of-bounds for medical time-outs. —PTI

Spain's Alcaraz came through 6-4, 7-6 (7-5), 6-7 (3-7), 6-7 (4-7), 7-5 after an enthralling five hours and 27 minutes against Zerver-AO

Olivia and John repeat as Australian Open mixed doubles



Olivia Gadecki and John Peers became the first team to win consecutive Australian Open mixed doubles titles since 1989 after beating the French pair of Kristina Mladenovic and Manuel Guinard 4-6, 6-3, 10-8 on Friday. The Australians trailed 7-5 in the final-set tiebreaker before coming back to lead 9-7. On match point and with Peers serving, Guinard hit a backhand into the net to clinch victory for the home players at Rod Laver Arena. Wild-card entries Gadecki and Peers were the first reigning Australian Open mixed doubles champions to return to the final the following year since Mladenovic and Daniel Nestor in 2015.

5TH T20I NZ VS INDIA

Samson's form, Axar's fitness concerns for India

T'PURAM, 30 JAN

Sanju Samson would expect passionate home support to lift his game even as India fret over Axar Patel's fitness when they wind up their T20 World Cup preparations in the fifth and final T20 International against New Zealand here on Saturday.

India were in experimental mode in the fourth T20I at Visakhapatnam, sticking to five front-line bowlers without resorting to all-rounders Hardik Pandya and Shivam Dube. The plan didn't yield the desired result as the hosts lost, even though the result does not alter the series outcome, which India has already sealed. As has been the case through this series, the bowling department might see some shake-up again, and the management could give a chance to mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy after resting him from the previous two matches.

The batting department might not see too many changes, but the management will keep an eye on Samson. A free-flowing batsman, Samson now appears to be holding the weight of the world on his shoulders. More than the drying up of runs, the think-tank will be worried about technical discrepancies that have crept into his batting of late, and the subsequent draining of confidence.

A laden back-foot and improper bat swing might require some deep correction ahead of the ICC showpiece starting February 7.

Since Samson is a contender for the pivotal opening slot at the marquee event, the lean patch cannot be allowed to enter a terminal phase.

But in his hometown, backed by adoring fans, Samson might just find the lost rhythm. That he is a superstar in this part of the country was evident from a video that the BCCI shared after the team's arrival.

Sanju probably has not scored many runs: Kotak

India's batting coach Sitanshu Kotak on Friday acknowledged that Sanju Samson has been going through a lean phase without doubting the quality of the struggling batter, and reiterated the team management's support for him. Samson has failed to get going in the ongoing five-match T20I series against New Zealand, amassing just 40 runs from four matches at an average of 10.The match starts at 7 pm —PTI

PHOTO: PTI

P.T. Usha's husband, Srinivasan, passes away

T'PURAM, 30 JAN

V. Srinivasan, husband of Indian Olympic Association President and Rajya Sabha MP P.T. Usha, died in the early hours of Friday, according to family sources. He was 64. Srinivasan collapsed at his residence early this morning. Although he was rushed immediately to a nearby hospital, he could not be revived, the sources said.Srinivasan retired as Deputy SP from the CISF and had been actively involved with the Usha School of Athletics, which has produced several international athletes.—*PTI*

Chotrani, Anahat, in Squash on Fire Open quarterfinals

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

India's Veer Chotrani stunned French world No. 19 Masotti in a five-game thriller to secure a place in the quarterfinal, while compatriot Velavan went down to second-seeded Mexican Leonel Cardenas at the Squash on Fire Open in Washington. World No. 49 Chotrani beat the fourth-seed Frenchman 11-6, 7-11, 8-11, 11-1, 11-9. He will meet sixth seed Declan James of England in the quarterfinals of the PSA Bronze-level event. In the women's section, seventh seed Anahat Singh beat South African Hayley Ward 11-5, 11-8, 12-14, 11-5 in the second round and will take on Egyptian second seed Sana Ibrahim in the quarterfinals.—*PTI*

Reed climbs leaderboard with 67 in Bahrain

AL MAZROWIAH, 30 JAN

Patrick Reed shot 5-under 67 in the second round of the Bahrain Championship on the European tour on Friday and was 10 strokes behind clubhouse leader Calum Hill of Scotland. Reed won the Dubai Desert Classic on Sunday and announced on Wednesday that he was leaving LIV Golf. The American will play on the European tour for the rest of the year.—*PTI*

THAILAND MASTERS

Devika stuns Supanida, enters SFs

BANGKOK, 30 JAN

India's Devika Sihag pulled off a big upset at the Thailand Masters Super 300 badminton tournament, stunning home favourite and top seed Supanida Katethong in straight games to reach the women's singles semifinals here on Friday.

The 20-year-old unseeded Indian, who claimed her maiden BWF International Challenge title at the Malaysia International last year, kept her composure to seal a 21-19, 21-18 victory in the quarterfinals that lasted just 40 minutes.

The world No. 63 will face fifth seed Huang Yu-Hsun of Chinese Taipei next. Devika has been steadily building momentum on the circuit. In August 2025, she wonthe Malaysia International, beating compatriot Isharani Baruah in the final. She was also part of the Indian mixed team that won a bronze medal at the 2025 World University Games.

Last season, Devika finished runner-up at the Indonesia Masters Super 100 and reached four finals in 2024, winning titles at the Swedish Open and Portugal International, while finishing second-best at the Estonian International and Dutch International. In another women's singles quarterfinal, Isharani fought hard but bowed out after losing 18-21, 21-1,6 21-13 to Malaysia's Wong Ling Ching. —*PTI*

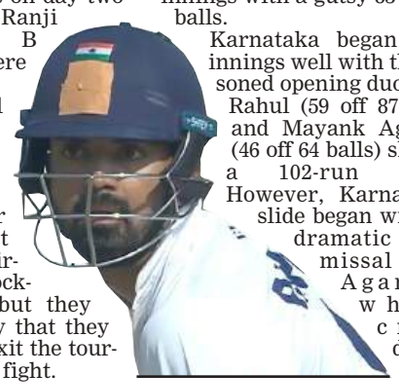
K'taka is on shaky ground against Punjab despite Rahul's fifty

MOHALI, 30 JAN

KL Rahul made a sublime half-century, but Harpreet Brar helped Punjab reduce Karnataka to 255 for six in their first innings on day two of their final Ranji Trophy Group B league fixture here on Friday.

The visitors still trail Punjab by 54 runs in a game that they must win to have a shot at qualification for the knock-out stage. Punjab is virtually out of knock-out contention, but they showed on Friday that they are not going to exit the tournament without a fight.

Resuming the day at 303 for nine, Punjab ended with 309 all out in 92 overs. Lower-order batter and spinner Emanjot Singh Chahal was the highest scorer of Punjab's innings with a gutsy 83 off 140 balls.



Karnataka began their innings well with the seasoned opening duo of KL Rahul (59 off 87 balls) and Mayank Agarwal (46 off 64 balls) sharing a 102-run stand. However, Karnataka's slide began with the dramatic dismissal of Agarwal, whose crisp drive was somehow pouched by Jashanpreet Singh off Emanjot at silly point.Rahul, at the other end, played delightful drives in his high-quality knock. His effort also included sweeps and reverse sweeps before he was bowled by a beauty from left-arm spinner Brar, who got the ball turn just enough from leg-stump to deceive the Indian batter and find the middle stump.Just like in Punjab's case, the lower-order got crucial runs for Karnataka.

Brief Score: Mohali, Punjab, 309 all out in 92 overs (Abhijeet Garg 81, Emjanjot Singh Chahal 83 batting; Vidyadhar Patil 4/56) vs Karnataka 255 for 6 in 87 overs (KL Rahul 59, Shreyas Gopal 42 batting; Harpreet Brar 4/101). —*PTI*

Hockey coach Fulton offers to resign, defends Manpreet

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Veteran midfielder Manpreet Singh's omission from India's core hockey probables on disciplinary grounds was vehemently opposed by chief coach Craig Fulton, who had threatened to resign before being persuaded to continue by Hockey India, a well-placed source told PTI on Friday.

It is reliably learnt that Fulton considered the push to sack Manpreet from the February 1 to 7 camp for 33 core probables in Rourkela as "external interference".

The two-time Olympic bronze-medallist was dropped from core probables for the first time in 15 years after it came to light that he had

indulged in the abuse of a recreational drug during the tour of South Africa in December last year.

In the meeting to decide the probables, Fulton was left "disturbed" after Hockey India President Dilip Tirkey, secretary general Bhola Nath Singh, and chief selector RP Singh collectively conveyed that Manpreet ought to be omitted. —*PTI*

SAFF U19 Women's C'ship: India U-17s ready for challenge against older girls

POKHARA, 30 JAN

The Indian U-17 women's team will play their first match in the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship 2026 against hosts Nepal at the Pokhara Rangasala Stadium here on Saturday.

Led by new head coach Pamela Conti, the U-17 team is using this higher-age group tournament as part of its preparations for the AFC U-17 Women's Asian Cup that will be held in China from April 30.

At the pre-competition press conference, Conti expressed her excitement ahead of her first tournament with the Young Tigresses.

"We are happy to be here in Nepal. I've been with the team for almost a week now, and we've had good training in Anantapur (Andhra Pradesh). We have a young squad as we

-PTI

are U-17, and we'll compete against older girls.

"More than the tournament itself, these games are a chance to assess ourselves and prepare for the Asian Cup and World Cup qualifiers," said the Italian.

Out of the 23 players in the SAFF U19 Women's Championship, 19 were part of the squad that qualified for the AFC U-17 Women's Asian Cup under Joakim Alexandersson in the Kyrgyz Republic last year.

For the four new players goalkeeper Shelna Maria Sajit, defender Akashi Naik, and midfielders Alva Devi Senjam and Redima Devi Chingkhamayum it will mark their debut for India in an international tournament. —*PTI*

DP WORLD NAMED TITLE, UMBRELLA PARTNER OF PGTI

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The Professional Golf Tour of India on Friday announced a multi-year partnership with DP World, under which the global logistics major becomes the title and umbrella partner of India's premier professional golf tour.

The partnership is expected to provide a significant boost to the domestic tour, with a focus on strengthening the competitive structure, enhancing opportunities for Indian professionals, and supporting the long-term development of the sport in the country. —*PTI*

EUROPA LEAGUE

Aston edges Salzburg 3-2 after 2nd-half comeback

LONDON, 30 JAN

Jamaldeen Jimoh-Aloba's first-ever goal for Aston Villa was an 87th-minute winner in a 3-2 comeback victory over Salzburg, which concluded the opening phase of the Europa League on Thursday night.

The 19-year-old Jimoh-Aloba's strike followed Tyrone Mings' equalizer at Villa Park. Morgan Rogers sparked the comeback in the 64th after the visitors built a 2-0 lead on an own goal from Victor Lindelof and then Moussa Yeo's goal.

Villa wasn't able to overtake Lyon atop the 36-team standings, however, after the French team beat 10-man PAOK 4-2 to remain in front of Unai Emery's team on goal difference. Both Lyon and Villa had already secured a spot in the round of 16.

Like in the Champions League, the top eight finishers advance automatically to the last 16. The teams placed from nine to 24 enter a two-leg playoff.

The rest of the top eight are: third-place Midtjylland, Real Betis, Porto, Braga, Freiburg, and Roma. Midtjylland, a Danish club, beat Dinamo Zagreb 2-0 to move up to third, two points back of Lyon and Villa. In Seville, former Manchester United winger Antony scored and set up Abde's goal in Real Betis' 2-1 win over Feyenoord. Porto rallied from a goal down to beat Rangers 3-1 and jump from ninth to fifth, Braga advanced in the sixth spot after a 0-0 draw at Go Ahead Eagles, and 10-man Freiburg slipped to ninth with a 1-0 loss at Lille. —*PTI*

Nitin Menon to officiate in his fourth T20WC

DUBAI, 30 JAN

Elite Panel umpire Nitin Menon will officiate in his fourth T20 World Cup, while fellow Indian Anantha Padmanabhan will make his debut in the ICC event beginning in India and Sri Lanka from 7 February.

Menon, the only Indian in the ICC Elite Panel, had earlier officiated in the 2021, 2022, and 2024 editions of the T20 World Cup.

The third Indian in the list for match officials announced on Friday is Madana gopal, who would be taking part in his second T20 showpiece.

On the opening day of the competition, Menon and Sam Nogajski will be in the middle for the Group C clash between Scotland and the West Indies.

The Indore-based Menon was part of the on-field team for the first semi-final at the 2024 World Cup, between Afghanistan and South Africa, while Nogajski's four group matches last time out included India's clash with the United States of America.

Menon is currently busy with the ongoing T20 series between India and New Zealand. —*PTI*